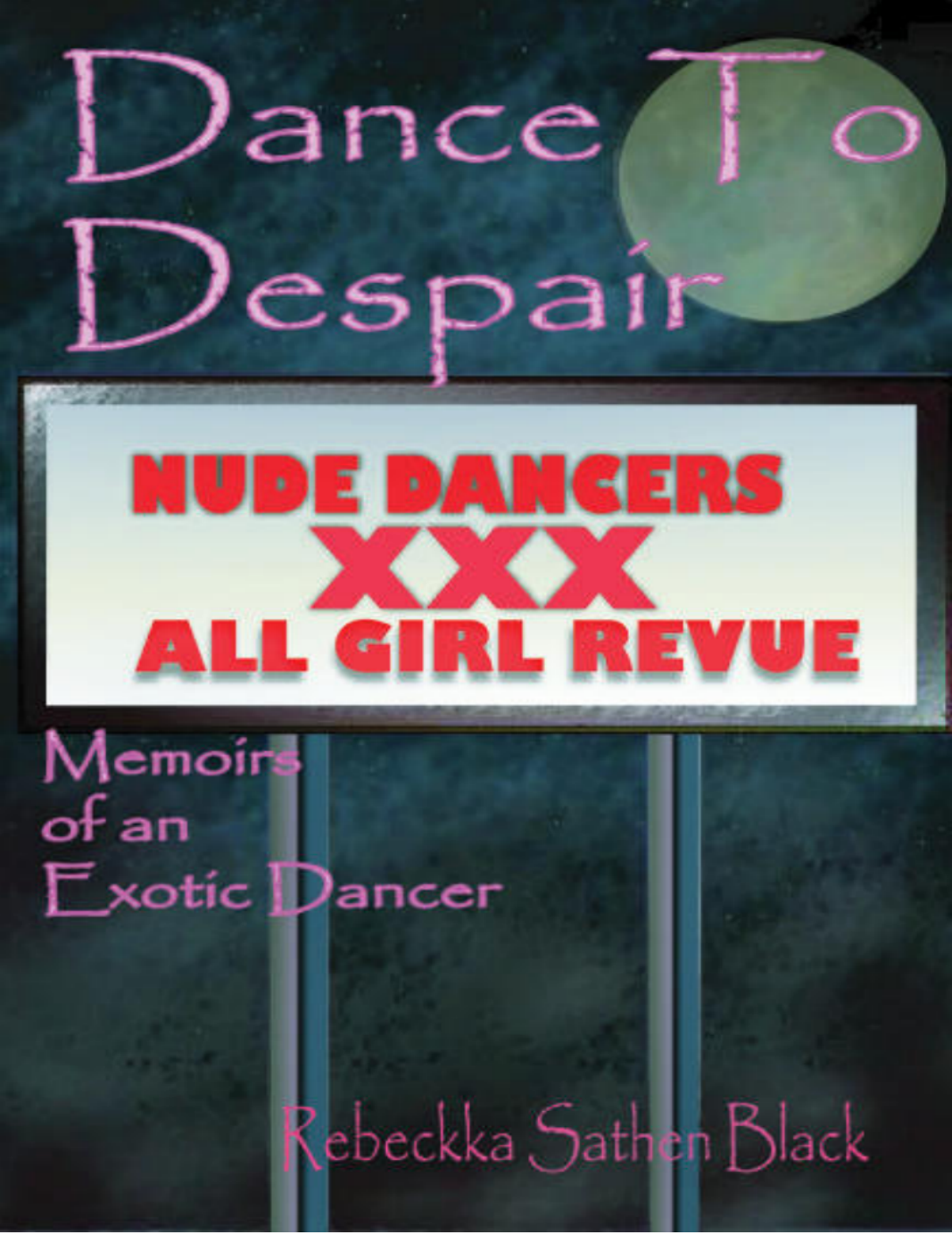
Dance To Despair
NUDE DANCERS
XXX
ALL GIRL REVUE
Memoirs of an Exotic Dancer
Rebeckka Sathen Black

SHOUT
SHARE
IT

Annotation

Based on the memoirs, of a beautiful woman's 23 year journey through the doors of Chicagoland's most infamous strip clubs that operated from the mid 1970's through the 1990's.

A native of Illinois, seventeen year old, Rebeckka Black segued into a life of rootless wandering. Besieged by emotional problems, the distraught, young woman is propelled into a relationship with a dangerous ex-convict. Restless and impulsive, she decides to accompany her companion to San Francisco. Realizing that she had made a serious mistake, Rebeckka hooks up with an unsavory couple who offer to drive her back to Chicago. Shortly after returning to her hometown of Glencoe, Illinois, she searches for another port in the storm. In a futile attempt to escape, Rebeccka, inadvertently makes a life altering decision that seals her fate…

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Rebeckka Sathen Black
DANCE TO DESPAIR
Memoirs of an Exotic Dancer

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Dedicated to the memory of Janis Joplin, whose music accompanied me throughout my career.

Thank you to Michael and Laura Joplin.

My personal thanks to Dawn Botkins for allowing me to gain further insight into the tragic life of Aileen Wuornos, a prostitute and convicted serial killer.

"Release me oh Lord from evil men,
protect me from men of violence."
Aileen Carol Wuornos
Death Row, Broward Correctional Institution
Pembrook Pine, Florida 1996

Preface

How do you explain where you have spent the last twenty-three years of your life, if you weren't married, gainfully employed, or engrossed in some type of a career?

Filling in a twenty-three year gap on a job application can be quite a challenge, even to the best of fiction writers. The bottom line is that if you were to be honest about your past, you would be virtually unemployable. Even an ex-con stands a better chance of attaining employment than an ex-stripper. Because of this, you can't be honest with anyone. Subsequently, your whole life becomes one big lie that you must continue for the rest of your life. Society has proven that it can be quite forgiving of just about anything. Yet, if you would openly confess in a job interview that you had once been a stripper, not even five master degrees would get you in the door of a reputable company. It's very difficult to account to a biased society under these circumstances, but what's even more difficult than having to account for it to other people is having to account for it to yourself.

For many years, I found myself ruminating about all the years of my life that I had wasted working in those seedy places. I felt guilty about not doing something more meaningful with my life, something that I could be proud of. But, every time I confronted my conscience about why I was still dancing, I fell into a deeper depression. Eventually, I became so despondent that I could no longer function. It was at this point in time that I began the life-long process of trying to repair the damaged person that I had become.

I worried about the end of my stripping career almost everyday since I began dancing at the age of twenty-two. I think all the dancers did. Even though most of us hated the business, it provided a false sense of security for us. I can still recall the conversations with the older dancers that were in their thirties and forties.

Our main concerns were how we're going to be able to find decent jobs and support ourselves once our stripping careers were over. Would we be able to survive on the meager salary of a "straight job?" The fear of not being able to survive in mainstream society became our ultimate psychological "jailor," keeping us imprisoned in strip clubs for most of our youth.

On top of feeling insecure professionally, most of us suffered from emotional problems, some more severe than others. I would venture to say that at least ninety-five percent of all the dancers that I knew, which were somewhere in the hundreds, came from highly dysfunctional family backgrounds, myself included.

Most had serious substance abuse issues. Only a handful of the

dancers were free of drug and/or alcohol addictions. I was fortunate to be one of them. There was, however, one basic commonality… none of us escaped the business emotionally unscathed.

In the last ten years, several major motion pictures have surfaced regarding the subject of strippers and or exotic dancers. However, these movies were grossly over glamorized and highly unrealistic to say the least.

Strip clubs have always been a mystery to the average public, and to some extent the authorities that fought for years to shut them down. Outside of an occasional newspaper article about a police raid, the average citizen was and still is virtually clueless as to what really went on in these establishments that lurked within the darkest shadows of their communities.

My intent as a writer is to shed some light on a very dark subject. Dance to Despair is the story of my twenty-three year journey through some of the most dangerous and corrupt adult entertainment clubs ever to exist in the Chicagoland area.

In 1985, the majority of Chicago's most infamous strip clubs were on the verge of closing down due to an intense four-year FBI sting operation, referred to as Operation Safe Bet. The IRS and FBI's 30 million dollar Chicagoland sting operation was originally orchestrated to gather information on crime-syndicated control of sex clubs.

The investigation began in March 1980, when a Chicago man who operated an illicit credit card laundering service, went to the FBI, complaining that the mob was "stalking" him down for payoffs. FBI officials soon took over the young man's company and placed him in the Federal Witness Protection program. The credit card company was servicing Chicagoland area strip clubs. Male patrons were dropping thousands of dollars a night in these clubs in exchange for companionship from the dancers.

Many of these men charged these services on their credit cards. However, the credit card companies were unaware that the credit card charges were actually being made at a strip club. The clubs operated under a false identity, hiding behind names like R&R Furriers, or Pete's Banquet Hall. When it came time for the customer to sign his credit card voucher, the voucher bore the fictitious name, not the actual name of the strip club. This credit card scam went on for some time before it was uncovered. The sting operation consisted of undercover FBI agents operating a credit card service that handled sex club billings.

The Chicagoland area strip clubs literally made a fortune by preying on unfaith-ful husbands, high rollers, and perverts who were willing to spend thousands of dollars in the hope of having sex.

Besides the laundering of money, and the illegal use of credit

cards, these establishments hosted a wide variety of other crimes such as racketeering, state fraud, mob connection, drug trafficking, prostitution, savage assaults on club patrons, and in some cases, even on the dancers themselves.

Although this is based on a true story, all characters have been fictionalized. All incidents and geographic locations have been altered and/or fabricated. Any similarity to any person living or dead is not intended and is purely coincidental.

“I can’t believe that I am still here. I close my eyes a hundred times; and a hundred times they open to this darkness. It’s a black abyss, cold and damp, with a cave like feel. There are no windows to exhale the years of exotic perfume, stale cigarette smoke, pest repellents, and sweat. The gloomy cave is crowded with man shadows mesmerized by the electric flames of the stage lights.

The dancers like peacocks are well feathered in bright shiny colors. Contrasting metals dangle from all parts of their bodies, both common and exotic. A woman who has survived in this dungeon has acquired many skills. Soft, sweet voices gig-gle and deceive with practiced innocence. The dancers profit from deceit, but more often than not, they just seek to survive.”

Dee Dee Garrett

1. A Troubled Past

"I ain't got no reason for living,
I can't find no cause to die,
I ain't got no reason for going,
I can't find no cause to stay here,
I got the blues,
I got to find me that middle road."

Janis Joplin, "No Reason for Living"

At the age of seventeen years old, I had already enrolled myself into a fairly unorthodox institution, most commonly referred to as the school of hard knocks.

Although the cost of tuition was quite high, I managed to pay for it. As a matter of fact, I paid for it dearly via the last twenty-three years of my life.

When did my problems begin? I don't know, or maybe, I just choose not to remember. Whatever the case may be, I certainly wasn't an under-privileged child by any stretch. Brought up in an upper-middle class community, located in the affluent Chicagoland North Shore, my parents were both very attractive and well educated people. Together, they collectively supplied a nice home for my younger siblings and I, but apparently that wasn't enough; at least not for a child like me. For some reason, I began to exhibit signs of emotional problems as early as ten years of age. By the time I turned thirteen, I was well on my way to becoming a troubled adult. I was different from most of my teenage peers, in the sense that I was totally disinterested in any type of scholastic activities outside of my art classes. I had absolutely no interest in going to college, or even finishing high school, for that matter. Running around with my friends and listening to music was the pinnacle of my existence. I never once thought about my future, because as far as I was concerned, I didn't even have one.

I was never a good student. I was average at best. According to my teachers, I certainly had the potential of being an above average student, but I never applied myself. My father put a lot of emphasis on scholastic achievements. When I was a little girl, he used to help me with my homework. Unfortunately, my father's help proved to be

more of a hindrance than anything else. Although he meant well, he didn't have the type of patience required to teach a young child. As time passed, my father became frustrated with me, and would often punish me in ways that weren't appropriate. Eventually my relationship between my parents and myself became highly combative because of it.

During my sophomore year in high school, I befriended a wayward young woman, who I had met in one of my art classes. Diana was a very rebellious individual with an incredibly warped sense of humor. I was immediately drawn to her mischievous personality; and before long, Diana and I began to spend quite a lot of time together.

Shortly after I met Diana, the two of us collectively befriended a fellow classmate of ours. Angela just so happened to have the same negative attitude toward life, and was equally as rebellious. Eventually, the three of us became virtually inseparable. Diana, Angela, and I were all very attractive young women that looked and acted a lot older than our years. In the early 70's, most high school students could be classified as being jocks, hippies, greasers, or nerds. My friends and I didn't fit into any of these categories. We were separatists who did our own thing; unlike most of the young women our age, the three of us always dated men that were older than us or from another high school all together.

When Angela turned sixteen years old, her wealthy father bought her a brand new, shiny, white, sports car. From this point on, the three of us were constantly truant from high school. Instead of attending classes, my two delinquent friends and I spent the greater part of our time driving around the North Shore, looking for trouble. When we became bored with that scenario, we would head over to Diana's house, to make prank phone calls to our principal's office, along with sending pizzas, ambulances, and moving trucks over to Diana's neighbors.

If I wasn't out bumming around with my friends, I could usually be found sitting in my room, listening to Janis Joplin's music, for which I developed a life-long affection. I rarely attended any of my classes. My grades plummeted from C's to F's as a direct result of my truancies. The handwriting was on the wall; my two friends and I were on the verge of becoming high school dropouts. By the time I turned sixteen, my parents had virtually lost all control over me. I was a head-strong teenager with serious emotional problems that neither my parents nor I were equipped to understand. My parents tried to stop me from spending so much time with my friends, because they felt that they were a bad influence on me; but I refused to cooperate.

At this particular point in my life, my friends were my only oasis.

Baffled by my rebellious behavior, my mother and father decided to take me to see a psychiatrist. Their efforts to straighten me out proved to be futile. I told the doctor to go to hell after just one visit, and continued to run around with my friends. The situation between my parents and I had become so incorrigible, that I couldn't stand to come home anymore. I began to disappear for two to three weeks at a time, without as much as a telephone call to my parents. When I turned seventeen, my mother and father refused to let me live with them any longer. I ended up homeless as a direct result of their decision.

Extremely misguided, I had absolutely no aspirations in life other than to find a way out of my deplorable situation. I dropped out of high school in the middle of my senior year. I was so behind in my credits that there was no point in continuing; or so I thought. My two friends ended up dropping out of school, shortly after I did. From this point on, the three of us had nothing but free time on our hands. While my peers were busy making plans to go to the Senior Prom, my friends and I were busy cruising seedy bars and nightclubs looking for boyfriends.

I was determined to find someone to help me.

One evening while bar hopping with Diana, I stumbled upon my ticket out. I met a quiet young man, who was on the verge of getting discharged from the military. After dating him for a couple months, I decided to marry him. Although I realized that my decision to get married was fairly premature, it beat ending up on the streets. My husband to be was a native of the state of Utah, and my intentions were to go home with him after he was discharged from the service.

I never bothered to tell my parents that I was planning to leave the state to get married. I never even as much as said goodbye, when I left. When my fiancee and I arrived in Utah, we lived with his parents for three months before getting married. My marriage to prince charming was relatively short-lived. Five months after we were married, my husband and I came to the conclusion that we didn't belong together. I called my friend Diana, who at the time was still in Illinois. I told her that my marriage was over and that I was moving back.

One week after I called Diana, my bags were packed and I was ready to close the doors on the Utah episode. Shortly after I returned back home to Illinois, I contacted my parents. Down and out, I pleaded with them to let me come back home. I was willing to conform to their rules, in exchange for somewhere to live.

My pleas fell upon deaf ears; my parents weren't receptive to my proposition. As far as they were concerned, I was incorrigible. Alone and destitute, I turned to my friend Diana for help. Once again, her family took me in. I lived with Diana for the next six months, and then

one day her parents told me that I had to move out.

Once again, I found myself on the hunt for a place to call home. My insecurities led me into a relationship with a dangerous and psychotic ex-convict, who was on the verge of breaking parole. On a whim, my new companion and I decided to move across the country. Our ultimate destination was San Francisco, California.

We chose to live there because in the early 1970's it was considered to be the hip-pest and most radical city in the country. Like everything else in my life, San Francisco was also short-lived. After a few months of living there, I knew I had made a serious mistake. I decided to ditch the disturbed ex-con, and returned to Illinois.

The only problem was that I didn't have enough money to get there. While living in California, I befriended a rather strange woman by the name of Faith. I met Faith in the waiting room of one of San Francisco's free medical clinics. I was getting treated for Hepatitis A, and Faith was there to pick up a refill for some type of psychiatric medication that had been prescribed to her because of her recent suicide attempt. Faith and I conversed for close to an hour while waiting for our appointments. After our appointments at the clinic were over, Faith and I went to lunch at a small Italian restaurant that was just down the street.

We sat and talked at the restaurant for a couple of hours. Through the course of our conversation, I learned that Faith was eight years older than I. Faith was a fairly radical person who enjoyed living the Bohemian lifestyle that was so popular during the late 60's and early 70's. She also was unemployed and in trouble with the law. Faith claimed that she had been apprehended in the state of Georgia for an alleged armed robbery that took place approximately one year ago, and had been eluding the police ever since she skipped bail. Before Faith and I parted ways, she gave me her phone number and insisted that I call her if I ever needed anything. Although I accepted the number, I had no intentions of calling her.

At that time, I was living in a run down trailer home with two young, married couples that I had met through the ex-con. I didn't have a job; therefore, I had no viable means of support. My only source of income was earned from babysitting for the people I lived with. My babysitting career ended though, after my roommates received an eviction notice from the landlord, who apparently didn't condone communal living.

Once again, I was homeless. Unable to deal with my plight, I resorted to calling the woman that I had previously met at the free clinic. Faith was elated to hear from me, and invited me to her home. I discovered that Faith's house was within walking distance from the trailer park that I had been living in. I told her that I would be there

within the hour. My newfound friend lived in a small, shabby, three-bedroom apartment in San Francisco, which was virtually devoid of any furniture. She shared her living quarters with a rough looking man, by the name of Robin. He appeared to be in his late thirties. Faith told me that Robin was her roommate. I ended up having dinner with them. They served Kraft macaroni and cheese. By the time dinner was over, Faith had invited me to come and live with the two of them. "Don't worry about paying rent," she said. "I've got some connections at a health spa. I might be able to get you a job there." I didn't have a lot else going for me at the time, so I decided to accept her offer. I had nothing to lose. Besides, if I could get my hands on enough money, maybe I could get back to Illinois. A couple of days after I moved in with Robin and Faith, I began working at my new job; which ended up being a dirty bookstore that was adjacent to a sleazy massage parlor, in a undesirable part of the city. My job was to stock shelves with pornographic material, and other sex-related paraphernalia. I also attended to the customers, and answered the telephone. This was my first exposure to any type of sex industry work, and unfortunately not my last. I worked there about one month with Robin. The bookstore was open seven days a week, from noon until midnight. I opened the store, and Robin closed it. Faith ended up spending her time hustling pool at the neighborhood bars for money.

On my way to work one morning, I was stopped by one of the tenants that lived in our apartment building. He told me that the police had been questioning all the people that lived there about a robbery that happened the other night, in one of the first-level apartments. The first thing that came to my mind was the fact that Faith had an outstanding warrant for her arrest. The last thing that I needed was for her to wind up in jail, which would cause me to be stranded in California all by myself. I had to get in touch with either her or Robin. Unfortunately, Faith didn't have a telephone, due to the fact that she never paid her telephone bill. I decided the best thing for me to do was to call Robin, because the police were in the process of questioning everyone in the building.

I threw on my leather jacket and proceeded to walk towards the payphone. Suddenly, it started to rain. San Francisco was notorious for that. Not wanting to get my hair wet, I began to run down the street towards the direction of the drug store. My intentions were to hang out in there, until the rain subsided. I wasn't paying attention to my surroundings, and was almost hit be a moving vehicle, while running across the side street. The driver quickly slammed on his brakes to avoid hitting me. I paid no attention to the incident, and started walking briskly.

From the corner of my eye, I happened to notice that someone

driving a crème-colored utility van was following me. I glanced over to see who the driver was. A smiling, heavyset man began to wave at me. I was in no mood to be bothered by admirers, so I didn't respond to his efforts trying to catch my attention.

Suddenly, the driver pulled over to the street curb and rolled down the passenger side window. "Hey," the stranger yelled. "I'm the guy who almost hit you back there." I continued walking towards my destination, still refusing to acknowledge the man's presence. Before I knew it, he had gotten out of his van and headed in my direction. Luckily, the drugstore was only half a block away. I ran through the glass doors of the drugstore in hopes of losing the man, but my efforts where to no avail. The stocky man continued to follow me into the store and approached me. The persistent stranger held out his hand to shake mine. "Hi," he said as a big grin graced his ugly face. "I'm Martin Cotello, and you just ran in front of my van a couple blocks ago." I said nothing. "You look like you're in a hurry or something," the man said.

I glanced out the store window. It was now pouring down rain. "I've just got some business to take care of," I replied. "I was heading toward the payphone down the street." I could feel myself becoming irritated at this conversation.

"That payphone is not working," he remarked.

"Why don't you let me give you a lift to the one by the bus station?" I thought about it for a minute. The man seemed harmless enough, so I decided to take him up on his offer. I left the store with the stranger. Together we walked down the street to where his van was parked. I noticed that there was some type of advertisement stenciled across the left side of the van that read "Cotello Auto Parts Service." I thought nothing of it, and climbed into the van.

"The payphone is right down here a ways," the man assured me.

I didn't reply. I was too absorbed with my own thoughts to care about what he was saying.

As soon as we got down to the end of the block, the man got on his CB radio and began talking to someone. "Yeah, it's me Martin. Hold all calls for me," he instructed the person on the other end. "I won't be going back to the shop today."

For a split second, a surge of terror came over me. I thought to myself, what if this guy is some type of murderer or something? But I quickly dismissed the thought, as we continued to drive down the street.

Meanwhile, I noticed that we had already passed up several payphones. A red flag popped up in my head. "You passed up two phone booths already," I said. I could feel my temper begin to escalate. "Oh those," he said, "They are out of order. I tried using one

myself the other day, and lost all of my damn change in the thing."

"You know what?" the stranger continued, "I've got to stop by the shop to pick up a couple of invoices. There is a payphone right out front that is working. You can use it."

"How far away is that?" I asked. "Just a few more miles," the man replied as a smile crossed his thin lips. "A pretty lady like you shouldn't worry so much."

"Look Mr.," I sarcastically said. "I don't have all damn day! Just let me out. I can walk faster than you can drive." The man ignored my request and proceeded to make a right hand turn at the intersection.

Now we were driving through a small industrial park. "Look," he said, "it's right over there." Straight ahead on the right hand side of the street was a medium sized building with a large blue and yellow sign that read Cotello's Auto Service.

A telephone booth was situated in the parking lot fairly close to the front door of the building. Martin pulled up to the garage-like structure and parked the van.

"See, here it is," he said.

"That's nice," I said as I jumped out of the man's vehicle. I watched him walk up to the front door of the building and unlock it. He went into the building leaving the door slightly ajar.

Apparently the shop was closed. Not wanting to waste any more time, I immediately headed for the payphone. I quickly shoved my money into the phone and began to dial the number to the bookstore, but the call didn't go through. At first I thought that I had dialed the wrong number, so I dialed again. The same thing happened. My change just kept filtering back into the return slot. To say that I was furious would have been an understatement. I lost my temper and violently slammed the phone onto the receiver as hard as I could, while screaming every profanity that I could think of. Martin must have heard me yelling and came to the front door.

"Hey, what's the matter?" he asked.

"The god damn payphone doesn't work, that's what!" I screamed.

"It doesn't?" he said. "Let me take a look at it."

He waddled out of the building and began to walk towards the phone booth, leaving the front door of the building wide open. Fed up, I walked out of the booth in order to make room for the large man to walk in. Just as he was about to step in, he grabbed me and began to wrestle me into the building. Once he got me inside, he slammed the front door closed and locked it. I knew that I was in serious trouble. By now, my violent temper had surfaced. I began to viciously fight my attacker as he struggled to get me down on the floor. In a desperate attempt to gain control of me, he grabbed a metal pipe off of a nearby wooden shelf and threatened to bash my head open if I

didn't cooperate. Then he proceeded to unzip the fly of his jeans and pulled out his penis, which he attempted to shove it in my mouth. Suddenly, I began to feel like I was going to pass out. I tried to scream, but nothing came out. My mouth and throat were so dry that I could barely swallow making it difficult for me to breath. I tried not to panic, which wasn't very easy to do in a situation such as this. Although my life was definitely in danger, my biggest fear was of actually getting raped. I was afraid of what I would do to the man if I lived to tell the tale. I believe that my uncontrollable temper is what ultimately kept me alive. Somehow, I managed to get the heavyset man off of me at the exact moment somebody began knocking at the front door of the building. My attacker quickly got up from the floor and went to answer the door. It was a customer. I took advantage of this opportunity and ran out the front door. I heard the stranger tell the bewildered customer that I was his girlfriend and that we had just had a big argument. He told the man that he would be back in fifteen minutes. As I ran through the parking lot that led into the street, my attacker yelled at me to get back into his van.

"I'll drive you home," he offered. "I promise," he screamed. If I would have been naive enough to get back into his van, I am certain that he would have killed me. Instead, I just kept running. I was cutting through people's backyards in an attempt to loose my predator. Approximately one hour later, I had made my way back to Faith's apartment building. A group of what I would call "low lifes" congregated around the main entranceway of the old building. Several empty bottles of tequila and Southern Comfort had been meticulously lined up on the old concrete steps that led to the front door of apartment building. I kicked them out of my way and went into the building.

When I walked into Faith's apartment, I was immediately greeted by Robin, Faith, and some scruffy guy that I had never seen before. The three of them were sitting on the floor drinking cheap wine and smoking dope. Faith asked me where I had been. Her voice was raspy from smoking dope and cigarettes. Acid rock music was playing faintly in the background. "I was just out getting raped,"

I sarcastically replied as I walked into the kitchen to get a glass of water, so that I could take a couple of aspirins. By now my body was beginning to feel the impact of the attack. I went into the bathroom to take a shower in the hopes of erasing the memories of what had just transpired earlier in the afternoon. But unfortunately, they had already become permanently embedded in my mind. I was furious with myself for not reporting the incident to the police, but I knew that once I left the state of California, I would never return, not even for a trial.

I thought about telling Faith about the attack, but what was the point? Although Faith and I resided together under one roof, we weren't particularly close. We just co-existed together for the time being for lack of anything better to do. I did tell her the police wanted to question her about a robbery that had taken place in one of the first floor apartments. I thought she might appreciate the information since she had a warrant out for her arrest. Faith didn't respond well to the news.

In fact, she went ballistic. "That's it," she screamed, "I'm out of here first thing in the morning." She claimed that she was going to Indiana where she knew some acquaintances that lived there. Her intentions were to ask Robin to drive her there and drop me off at my friend's house in Illinois.

Robin agreed to drive the two of us across country. I was relieved that I would no longer have to work in the disgusting adult bookstore, come up with airfare to Chicago, or run into that horrible man that attacked me again. It just had to be a win-win situation, or so I thought.

By 6:00 a.m. the next morning, Faith and I were packed and ready to go. Robin supposedly borrowed a car from a friend of his to make the trip to the Midwest.

It took us approximately three and half days to drive to Illinois because Robin was the only one driving. Faith didn't have a driver's license and I didn't drive on expressways. We ended up having to spend a couple of nights in some seedy, cheap, roadside motels so Robin could get some rest. When we arrived finally in the Chicagoland area, Robin and Faith informed me that they had to make a quick stop in Wheaton, Illinois. Robin said he had some business to take care of with a friend. I was so close to my destination that I had to go along for the ride.

When we arrived in the small town of Wheaton, Robin pulled off the main highway and began to drive down a fairly remote road that led us to a small residential subdivision that was surrounded by open fields. Robin parked the car on the side of the road approximately one fourth mile away from the housing development.

He told Faith and me to "stay put" until he returned. The whole thing sounded fishy to me, but I was in no position to ask questions. Robin got out of the car and walked through a thicket of over-grown shrubs and disappeared out of eye-sight.

I was left alone with Faith who was sleeping off a hangover in the back seat of the car. Robin returned fifteen minutes later carrying a large brown box and a .45 caliber revolver. I didn't think much of the box, but the gun scared me. Robin didn't have a gun on him when he left the car that I was aware of. He seemed agitated and in a hurry to

leave. Robin threw the mysterious box into the trunk of the car. He put the gun in the glove compartment and told me not to touch it because it was loaded. Robin threw the car in drive and took off. We were now officially on our way to Glencoe, Illinois. By now, Faith had woken up and was smoking a cigarette. Robin had cracked open a bottle of Southern Comfort and began guzzling it down as if it was iced tea. I purposely struck up a conversation with Faith in hopes of distracting myself from the situation. By the time we arrived in the affluent town of Glencoe, Robin had practically polished off the entire bottle of Southern Comfort. He was driving recklessly, ignoring all traffic signals, and posted speed limits.

We were now only a couple of miles away from my friend Diana's house. While driving down the familiar streets of Glencoe, we came across some road construction. One of the side streets had been blocked off and a road detour had been set up. The street was in the process of being resurfaced. Robin, who was now completely inebriated, decided that he didn't want to be inconvenienced by the detour, and proceeded to drive over the wet, black-tarred street. A construction worker, who was standing on the wayside, began yelling at Robin to get off the road. Robin rolled down the driver's side window of the car and told the man to mind his own business. The speed limit on this street was 20 mph. Robin was doing at least 50 mph and driving in the wrong direction. It was an accident waiting to happen. Even Faith was growing concerned and began screaming for Robin to slow down, but her protests fell on deaf ears. Robin told her to shut up and leave the driving to him. Infuriated by Robin's remark, Faith quickly climbed into the front of the car and attempted to grab the steering wheel from Robin. The commotion caused Robin to lose control of the car, which resulted in him side-swiping a parked vehicle. An elderly man, who apparently witnessed the accident, came running out of his house screaming frantically and waving his arms for Robin to stop the car. Robin ignored his pleas and kept driving while simultaneously wrestling with Faith for control of the steering wheel. Robin somehow managed to reach in the glove compartment and pull out his gun. I was panicking by now. We were now only five minutes away from my friend's house.

Before I knew it, Robin had shot out the entire back windshield of the car. Shattered glass flew all over the backseat. Then he started shooting bullets into the front windows of the homes as he sped down the street. Faith and I began to scream at him to pull over, and let us out of the car, but he didn't respond to our pleas. Robin continued driving recklessly down the narrow suburban street.

"How much further does this bitch live?" he yelled. "Right down there on the left side of the street," I said as I pointed to a large,

white, brick home on the corner.

"Just pull in the damn driveway and let me out!" I demanded. Robin carelessly pulled into my friend's driveway and stopped the car long enough for me to get my things. I hastily grabbed my suitcases and got out of the car.

"Don't you dare call the police," Faith threatened me as I walked away from the car.

"I'll handle this lunatic."

Robin threw the car in reverse and squealed out of the driveway. I hauled my luggage to the front door of Diana's house and rang the bell. My friend answered the door with a telephone in her hand. She motioned for me to be quiet.

"I'm talking to my mom's friend, Gregg. He's a dispatcher at the Glencoe police station." Diana told me that Gregg had called to talk to her mother, but he put her on hold because of an emergency call that had just come in concerning a nearby shooting incident. My heart just about leapt out of my chest. I was certain that the incident the dispatcher was referring to concerned Robin and Faith. I waited anxiously for my suspicions to be confirmed. A couple of minutes later, Diana said, "I'm sick of waiting," as she slammed down the phone on the cradle. Diana gave me a big hug and apologized for being on the telephone.

"How did you get here?" she asked. I hesitated before answering her. I figured that I might as well tell her what was going on because she was going to find out anyhow. "I was with the people involved in the shooting incident," I remarked.

Diana, who was well acquainted with my jaded sense of humor, began to laugh.

"Very funny," she said in her usual sarcastic tone of voice.

"I'm not kidding. I was living with these two people in San Francisco, and they gave me a ride back to Illinois," I stated.

"Yeah right!" she nonchalantly replied as she rifled through her purse looking for her cigarettes.

"I'm serious," I told her, "the guy I was with had a gun and was shooting people's living room windows out about four blocks away from here."

Diana looked at me in total disbelief. She didn't know about the two people I lived with in San Francisco or anything that went on there. Although Diana was my only best friend, there were times that she and I didn't communicate for several months. However, she didn't remain in the dark for long. I told her the entire story from beginning to end and spared her no details.

Diana was shocked about what I had told her. She picked up the telephone and began to dial the number of the police station. "We've

got to find out what's going on," she insisted. Her dispatcher friend answered the phone and a couple of minutes later my suspicions were confirmed. The police apprehended Robin and Faith on a nearby expressway twenty-five minutes after they dropped me off at Diana's house. The police had received several emergency phone calls from people who lived in Diana's subdivision, claiming that a man driving a blue car had shot out the front living room windows of their homes. According to the dispatcher, the driver of the car attempted to elude the police, which resulted in a high-speed chase. Robin lost control of the car and ended up smashing it into the guardrail. Robin and Faith were arrested at this time and taken into custody. The dispatcher was unable to provide Diana with any more information at the time. I was relieved. The episode was over, and it was one less thing I had to worry about, or so I thought.

Three hours later there was a knock at the front door. Diana's mother answered the door, because Diana and I were sitting outside in the backyard. Two detec-tives greeted her and asked to speak to me. To make a long story short, I was taken down to the Glencoe police station for questioning, regarding the robbery and shooting incident that had transpired earlier in the day. I had nothing to hide so I cooperated with the police. I told them everything I knew about Robin and Faith, which by the way, wasn't much. I also explained to them that I had nothing to do with the robbery that took place in Wheaton, Illinois, or any other illegal activities that involved Robin and Faith. I was simply a passenger trying to get back to Illinois from San Francisco as frugally as possible.

The police weren't satisfied with my testimony, and placed me under arrest for burglary charges. Robin and Faith had also been charged with burglary and an assortment of other felonies that included attempted manslaughter, possession of an illegal firearm, and eluding the police. Robin was a first time offender, but Faith had an existing warrant out for her arrest for armed robbery. The three of us were in serious trouble.

Once the arrest process was completed, I was transported from Glencoe police station to a downtown Chicago precinct and put in jail. I shared a cell with a quack fortune teller and a couple of scraggly-looking prostitutes. One hour after I was locked up, a female police officer informed me that I was allowed to call one person that I thought would be willing to post my bail. Although it had crossed my mind to call my parents, I decided against it because I honestly didn't think they would help me. There was only one other person that I could call and that was Diana's mother.

Diana's mom showed up at the police station a couple of hours later with a top-notch, criminal attorney, who so happened to be a

close friend of hers. She posted my bond and took me back to her home. I lived with Diana and her mother for the next several weeks. The attorney was able to get the burglary charges dropped that had been filed against me and her bond money was returned to her. Robin and Faith weren't as fortunate as I, and remained in jail until their trials were over. Both of them were found guilty on various charges and received a lengthy prison sentence. I never corresponded with either one of them again. Now, the entire incident was finally over and I could go on.

Shortly after this, Diana's mother told me that I had to find another place to live.

She didn't want to take on the added responsibility of another troubled girl.

"One problem child is enough," she said. I was completely devastated and didn't take the news well. Diana's mother gave me $300 and drove me to the local YMCA. This was to be my new home for the next couple of months. During this time, I shared a room with several older and very dysfunctional women. This was one of the worst experiences of my life. I ended up having to take a low-paying job at a local dry cleaner in order to pay my rent.

I was alone and had nothing or anyone in my life. My only solace was my friend Diana, who I called collect on a regular basis. My existence was pathetic and bereft of any type of normalcy. However, I was a strong, young woman who was determined to change my deplorable situation. After racking my brains for several weeks, I managed to come up with a temporary solution for my problems. I decided to join the armed forces, preferably the Navy.

My decision to join the Navy was based solely on my need to survive. I had absolutely no interest in the military or anything else for that matter. Enveloped in emotional pain, my only concern in life was to make sure that I had a place to live. There was an Armed Forces Recruiting station within walking distance of the YMCA. I decided to enlist as soon as possible.

The day that I decided to walk into the recruiting center, I was clad in my usual attire of black clothing; tight jeans, a low-cut, spandex top, and leather boots. My hair was platinum blonde, and styled very similar to that of Marilyn Monroe. My eye makeup was relatively heavy, and my lips were painted a sumptuous shade of red. I certainly didn't look like the typical woman that would join the service.

A handsome, but very tired looking older man, wearing an army uniform sat behind a cluttered desk carelessly thumbing through a Field and Stream magazine. I casually walked over to his desk and asked him if he could help me. The man looked up at me for one brief

moment, and then proceeded to read his magazine. He commented quickly, “The beauty shop is down the street young lady.”

Highly offended by the man’s condescending remark, I quickly informed the recruiting officer that I wasn’t looking for a beauty shop. “Excuse me,” I said.

“I’m here to enlist in the military if you don’t mind.” A total look of bemusement crossed the silver-haired man’s face. “O.K. young lady,” he replied apologetically,

“have a seat and let’s see what we can do for you.” In the early 1970’s, women couldn’t enlist in the military without a high school diploma or a GED. However, this rule didn’t apply to the male population. The recruiting officer personally drove me to a nearby community college so that I could take my GED test. I passed the exam, and I was scheduled to leave for boot camp within three weeks.

I made a snap decision to join the Navy. It was based on the fact that I preferred the look of the naval uniform to any of the other military branches. My enlistment contract was for three years. During this period, I worked in the personnel department for one of the Naval Technical Training Centers. I processed individuals for disciplinary hearings. I worked very close with a Lieutenant Commander who kept an impressive stash of pornographic magazines in his desk drawer. He was also in constant pursuit of my affection.

The military environment provided me with some semblance of security. I had a roof over my head, medical attention, and three meals a day. The military was an answer to a prayer for a young woman in my position, but not for long. By the end of my second year, I wanted out. I was too emotionally unstable to adhere to the rules and regulations of such a militant existence.

I received an honorable discharge from the Navy a couple of weeks before my twenty-second birthday. As far as my military experience was concerned, I can’t say that it was a particularly unpleasant one. I was fortunate enough to have befriended some very nice people. Outside of that, I failed to derive much else from my stint in the service.

2. Beginning a New Life

The fact that I didn't even have enough money to rent a doghouse sent me into an immediate state of panic. Although I didn't want to admit it, I had put myself in the exact same position that I was in before I joined the service. Desperate for a place to live, I threw myself at the mercy of a Chief Petty Officer, whom I befriended while I was in the Navy. My friend's name was Jed Lenner. Jed and I worked together in the same office for over a year. During this time, I got to know Jed and his family quite well.

The benevolent couple immediately came to my aid. The Lenners took me into their home, and assured me that I could stay with them for as long as I wanted.

Shortly after I moved in with them, I began to look for a job. As I began to skim through the job ads in the newspaper, I realized that I virtually had no marketable job skills. The thought of not being able to find a job was overwhelming to me. I combed through the columns of job ads in the hopes of finding something that I could do. I finally ran across an ad that peaked my interest. It read something like this:

> $$$ EXOTIC DANCERS WANTED $$$
> EARN $700 A WEEK PLUS
> NO EXPERIENCE NECESSARY

There was a phone number in the job ad. I called the number immediately. A man answered the telephone and told me that the club didn't open until 7:00 p.m., and that I should call back later in the evening. I asked him the name of the club. I recognized the name "Ruby Garter" instantly. I had seen the sign numerous times from the expressway. I had often wondered about the mysterious building, but never dreamed that someday I would be working there. Reducing myself to stripping for a living wasn't exactly something that I wanted to do, but at the time it seemed like my only recourse. I convinced myself that I would strip for "just awhile." Years later, I discovered that my resolution to strip for "just awhile" was the hallmark proclamation of practically every exotic dancer that I had ever met. The problem with deciding to strip for "just awhile" was that somehow the "just awhile" part turned into a couple of decades.

Later on in the day, I called Diana and asked if she would mind giving me a lift to the Ruby Garter club. I had not talked to Diana for a couple months, so she had no idea that I had been discharged from the Navy. She was surprised to learn that, and even more surprised when I told her that I had decided to go to work at a strip club. Diana

agreed to give me a lift to the club. She said she would pick me up at 8:00 p.m. the following evening.

Monday evening arrived before I knew it. I clearly remember sitting in my mod-est, little bedroom hunched over my makeup mirror that I kept perched on a cardboard box desperately trying to put on my makeup. Once I had finished creating the perfect face, I went into the bathroom to fix my shoulder length, platinum-blonde hair. I looked perfect. The finishing touch was a pair of long sparkling rhinestone earrings that hung seductively against my suntanned neck.

I slid off my old white t-shirt, and slipped into a skintight, red spandex dress. A wicked looking pair of metallic gold, five-inched spiked heels complimented my shapely legs. I carelessly sprayed myself with my favorite perfume, while admiring myself in the mirror. Although I thought that I looked pretty good, I wouldn't have wanted the Lenners to see me dressed like this. Needless to say, I was relieved when I learned that they would be gone for the evening.

I remember the house being extremely quiet that night. As I walked down the stairs, which led to the kitchen, the clanging sound of my gold electroplated bracelets intensely magnified the unsettling silence. I sat down at the blue formica table that was carefully positioned in front of a large glass picture window, and waited patiently for Diana to pick me up. Little did I know that evening would seal my fate for the next twenty-three years.

Diana was always running late, and this evening was no exception. At first, I didn't think that she was coming, but she finally showed up. The Ruby Garter club was about thirty-five miles away from where I was living. Before I knew it, we had arrived at my future place of employment. The fact that I was about to enter the building that I had seen so many times before seemed almost surreal.

Not knowing what to expect, we parked as close as we could to the front of the building. Diana and I walked through the large, gravel parking lot toward the club. Four weather-beaten concrete steps led up to a pair of huge glass doors that were covered with life-sized photographs of scantily clad women dressed in wicked looking black leather ensembles. I pulled open one of the large glass doors. We walked into the foyer. The inside of the building was a lot bigger than I had imagined and resembled a movie theater. We were immediately approached by a tall, middle-aged man, clad in a beige leisure suit. The slender stranger smiled at us, revealing a perfect set of napkin white teeth. He asked us if he could be of some help. I nodded my head yes. Diana remained silent while I did all the talking. I told the man that I was looking to speak to the manager in regards to employment. He asked me if I was a dancer. I answered, "Yes." The man extended his long slender hand to shake mine. "I'm the manager

here," he said. I noticed that his handshake was somewhat lingering. "My name is Casey." An insincere smile graced his face. I introduced myself as "Sathen Black," which I had intended to use as my stage name. Sathen was the name of a witches cat, that was burned at the stake with its owner in the mid 1600s.

The manager asked me to come into his office for an interview and politely requested that my girlfriend wait for me at the bar. As we walked to the office, Casey rambled on incessantly about the Ruby Garter club claiming that it was the most infamous strip club in the Chicagoland area. "Do you want to know why this club is such a success?" he asked me. Not really, I thought to myself. "It's a success because I made it a success. That's why." I realized at this point that this man was on some type of a power trip. I wasn't interested in or impressed with anything that he had to say. I just wanted a job.

His so called office was located in the lower level of the building down a dark claustrophobic hallway. As soon as we walked in, Casey flicked on the light and quickly closed the door behind us. The fact that he had locked the door made me feel extremely uncomfortable. The very first thing that I noticed about the office was that there was what seemed like two hundred nude photographs of naked women plastered all over the walls. I ordinarily wouldn't have found the pictures offensive, nor would I have been shocked to see this type of material hanging up in the office of a strip club. The thing that concerned me though, was the fact that all the women's heads and breasts had been deliberately cut from the photographs. I found this to be rather odd.

The manager invited me to sit down on a popsicle-pink colored love seat. Casey sat directly across from me on a red furry couch. He asked me a plethora of questions…my age, where was I from, where did I live, my marital status, and last but not least, my measurements. I answered all of his questions truthfully except for the one about my measurements. I lied and made up a number that I thought up just to get him off the subject.

Casey began to make small talk with me, but I managed to guide the conversation toward the topic of salary. He told me that the dancers made $75 a night plus commission. The word "commission" concerned me. When I asked my potential employer to explain how the commissions were earned and how much they would be, he became rather defensive. He skirted around the issue by insisting that the waitresses would explain it all to me on my first night of work. His answer aroused my suspicions. I got the distinct feeling that he was hiding something, but I let it slide. I figured that I would find out what was going on soon enough.

A few moments later, Casey asked me if I was prepared to

audition. According to him auditions were mandated before any hiring decision could be made. I really hadn't anticipated having to go up on a stage and strip that evening, but I agreed to the audition anyhow. Casey and I left the office and walked back upstairs. He led me down a small scarcely lit hallway that was reminiscent of a cave. Life sized black silhouettes of nude women were painted on the walls of the small corridor.

I could hear the sounds of women's voices in the not so far distance. A carelessly hung red curtain covered a doorway that was at the end of the hall. Casey walked up to the red drape and pulled it aside. "Here's the dressing room," he announced. I have to admit that I was mortified at what I saw. I guess I was expecting to see some lavish dressing room with mirrors lit up with movie star lights and impressive vanities. Instead, I was introduced to a cold damp room, laden with cigarette smoke, and the smell of last week's perfume. Approximately eighteen semi-nude women sat slumped around an old L-shaped formica counter that was utterly filthy and in a state of disrepair. The women were engaged in brazen conversations. Most of them were smoking cigarettes or putting on their makeup. The large mirrors that were mounted on the walls behind the formica counters were broken and cracked. Worn-out red carpet, taped up at the seams with silver duct tape, served as a host for a vast assortment of glitzy spiked heels, garbage, and liquor bottles. Dirty g-strings were strewn all over the floor. A dilapidated garment rack stood in the far corner of the room. Beneath it was a pile of dusty records. The manager instructed me to choose four songs from the pile of records and give them to the bartender.

"You've got to be totally nude by the fourth song," he reminded me as he walked out of the dressing room. I could feel the eyes of all the dancers on me as I stooped down to sort through the pile of records.

"There's more in that black garbage bag over there," a very pretty auburn haired woman said. I had no intention of sifting through a garbage bag to look for records. I randomly grabbed four 45's from the pile on the floor and quickly left the dressing room. I walked out to the bar and presented the bartender with the records that I had chosen. I noticed that the manager and Diana were sitting down at the far end of the bar engrossed in some sort of conversation. The entrance to the stage was located in the corner of the dressing room, hidden behind a pair of dusty pink velvet drapes. I returned to the dressing room after delivering the records to the bartender and stood behind the drapes anxiously waiting for my music to begin. A few minutes later, my music began to play.

Without hesitation, I pulled the heavy drape aside, walked up to

the stage, and never looked back.

My performance went smoothly. Although I appeared to be calm, cool, and collected, inwardly I felt very sad. It bothered me to think that I was incapable of doing anything else for a living but strip. I wasn't especially nervous nor did I connect the act with anything sexual. Choosing to become a stripper was a decision that I had made solely based on monetary gain, nothing else.

As soon as my audition was over, I put my clothes back on and walked over to the bar where Diana and the manager were sitting. "Great job," Casey said, as he looked me up and down. "You have an extraordinary body," he remarked. "Stick with me and you'll make a lot of money," he commented as he slid his sweaty hand lightly down my exposed outer thigh. I ignored his comment along with the unwelcome caress. I got right to the point, and asked him if I could start work the following night. Casey patted me on the behind and instructed me to be at the club the following evening by 7:00 p.m. I shook hands with my new employer and left.

Diana and I walked back out into the parking lot of the club. As we approached Diana's car, we noticed that a very pretty young woman was sitting in the car that was parked to the immediate left of Diana's. The woman had the passenger side window rolled down and she was smoking a cigarette. She began a conversation with me as I was getting into Diana's car. "Are you a dancer?" she asked. I told her that I had just been hired at the Ruby Garter. "That's too bad," she said.

"You're going to regret it. That manager is a real asshole. He just fired me an hour ago because my mother called me at his house." At first I was completely disinterested in what the woman had to say. Then curiosity got the best of me.

"Why would he do that?" I asked. After all, it did sound a little far fetched. My inquiry opened up a can of worms and I was given a lot more information than I had bargained for. According to this person, Casey exercised control over a majority of his female employees. Apparently, most of the women who sought employment at this club were homeless and virtually indigent. Casey, who wasn't oblivious to the women's plights, saw their misfortune as an opportunity to capitalize on their earnings.

Casey allegedly coerced the unsuspecting women into moving into his large home in St. Charles. Shortly after the women moved in, he would begin to take control over their money and their personal lives. They never saw any of their hard earned cash. Casey told the women that he was saving their money for them in a vault and that he would dispense it when they were ready to move out on their own someday. The tactics that Casey used on his victims were similar to

those employed by destructive cult leaders. In order to gain complete control over these directionless individuals, he made sure that they became drug dependent.

Heroin was the drug of choice. Once he had the women hooked on heroin, he began to have control over them sexually. He threatened to fire them if they were caught having sex with anyone other than him.

Families and friends weren't to know the women's whereabouts. Under no circumstances were the women allowed phone calls from relatives or visitors.

Casey's phone number and address weren't privy information for anyone to divulge. Those who disobeyed the rules were beaten and thrown out of Casey's home. He supposedly forced his brainwashed employees to perform an assortment of perverted sex acts with himself, animals, and high-paying customers.

Although I found the woman's testimony alarming, it didn't dissuade me from working at the club. In the same token, I certainly didn't discount what she had told me. Diana and I spent close to an hour conversing with the distraught young stripper. After our conversation ended, we drove to the Lenner's residence forty-five minutes later. Diana dropped me off directly in front of their house.

As I walked away from Diana's car that evening, I was suddenly overcome with guilt. I couldn't believe that I had reduced myself to the profession of stripping.

After all, stripping naked on a stage in front of hundreds of men wasn't exactly what I would call gainful employment. Nor was it the type of occupation that I wanted to expose Mr. and Mrs. Lenner too. I thought that I had no choice but to move out of their home.

The next day, I informed the Lenners that I would be moving out within the month. When I told them where I had gotten a job, they were dumbfounded. I could tell by the looks on their faces that they weren't particularly overjoyed with my decision. Concerned for my welfare, the Lenners tried their best to dissuade me from getting involved in the sex industry. According to Jed and his wife, strip clubs were dangerous places that operated outside of the law. Although a part of me knew they were right, I chose to ignore the warning.

3. A New Life at Ruby Garter

The Ruby Garter club looked remarkably different in the daylight. All of the building's unsightly bruises were exposed. The parking lot was dirty and relatively empty aside from a couple of brand new Cadillacs. Diana dropped me off directly in front of the club's entrance. Once again I walked up the four chipped concrete steps that led to the inside of the building…only this time, I climbed them alone.

An overwhelming feeling of apprehension came over me as I walked through the front door. I wondered if I had made the right decision. My gut told me that I didn't, but I proceeded with my self-destructive venture anyhow.

My new boss greeted me the minute I walked into the foyer. Casey escorted me to the dressing room. Unlike the previous evening, the room was empty except for one heavyset woman. He introduced me to the woman and instructed her to show me where I was to put my things. Sunlight, as she referred to herself, pointed to a little freestanding dressing table that was shoved into a small corner.

A few moments later she began to ramble on about her husband, telling me intimate details about their marriage. I pretended to listen to her for awhile and then I changed the subject. I asked her how long she had been dancing. The chubby woman began to laugh as she patted her protruding jelly-like abdomen that was miraculously stuffed into a skintight, blue mini dress. "Are you kidding!" she exclaimed. "I'm too fat to dance. I just mix."

I had not yet learned the jargon of strip clubs, so I had absolutely no idea as to what the term "mix" meant. Later in the game, I learned that not all the women who worked in strip clubs were dancers. The women who didn't dance on the stage were referred to as "mixers." Those women were usually not attractive enough to dance on the stage. Their sole function was to persuade customers to spend money in exchange for their company.

I asked Sunlight if it was mandated that both the mixers and the dancers solicit the customers. Her answer was "yes." According to her, this was how the club owners and their employees made most of their money. I didn't like the idea of being forced to solicit men. There was no doubt in my mind that I would have a problem performing this particular part of the job.

It was now approaching 7:00 p.m. The dancers slowly began to flow into the dressing room one by one. I noticed that the ages of the women varied drastically.

The youngest was probably seventeen and the oldest appeared to be somewhere in her late fifties. There was also a broad assortment of

flamboyant transvestites gracing the stage of the Ruby Garter. The transvestites were extremely theatrical looking and could pass as real women in the dark caverns of the club. Most of these transvestites had at one time or another worked in the seedy nudie clubs located in the infamous New Orleans' French Quarter. The female strippers that worked at this club were average looking women with fairly decent bodies, but none of them were beauty queens.

I quickly learned that there were two different categories of dancers that worked at strip clubs: "road girls" and "house girls." Road girls travel all over the country and worked at a variety of different strip clubs for short periods of time. Two or three weeks were pretty much the normal length of stay. House girls were the club's permanent employees who worked anywhere from a few hours a week to all night every night. Some of these women had been working at the Ruby Garter for well over ten years.

On my first night, the waitresses taught me how the club operated. The main function of the dancers, other than performing on the stage, was to approach and coerce the customers to spend their money on them in exchange for their company. This was "mixing." There were two types of mixers: "light mixers" and "heavy mixers." Light mixers didn't engage in any sexual activity with the customers. The heavy mixers performed a variety of sexual acts with the male patrons that usually only excluded intercourse.

The waitresses who were an integral part of most strip club operations were the negotiators. They were responsible for all the financial transactions made at the clubs. When a customer came into a strip club, there were several things he could choose to do. First of all, very few strip clubs were allowed to sell alcohol if they advertised nude entertainment. Therefore, the customer's choice of beverages was limited to coke, seven-up, and non-alcoholic beer, otherwise known as "near beer." Some customers simply chose to sip on a coke and watch the show while others elected to spend time with the dancers. The only way that the men were allowed to mingle with the women who worked at the club was if they bought the dancer a cocktail or spent a considerable amount of money to go into a secluded area with her. If the customer consented to buy a dancer a cocktail, which was ten dollars and consisted of nothing more than a small glass of stagnant water with a little red plastic stick in it. The dancer would receive two dollars. The waitresses' cut of the commission on dancer's cocktails was one dollar.

The remaining seven dollars went to the house. The purpose of soliciting these ten-dollar glasses of water was to give the dancers the opportunity to initiate conversations with the men. These conversations were to entice the customers to spend large amounts of

money. After the dancers had spent several minutes talking to a customer, the waitress would suggest that he spend $288 in exchange for some time with the dancer. After the customer paid, the waitress would escort both the man and his date to the dark secluded area in the back. If the waitress was feeling especially benevolent, the customer would be given a free coke. This was usually someone else's watered down drink that she had pulled off a dirty table. These secluded areas consisted of nothing more than a small group of tables and chairs located in a dark corner of the room. Most customers were disappointed when they learned that there were no bedrooms available.

Once the dancer and her customer had been delivered to the back area, the waitress would ask the man for a tip. Most of the time, the waitresses were tipped generously. It wasn't uncommon for the waitresses to receive tips that far exceeded the twenty percent that the dancer made. After the waitress collected her tip, the dancer was left alone with the customer for approximately ten minutes. The dancers were forbidden to accept tips from the customers, but a majority solicited them anyhow. Some of the more experienced strippers were capable of talking the men out of unbelievably large amounts of money. Others stuck to the rule for fear of losing their jobs.

After the initial ten minutes was up, the waitress would return and attempt to make the customer spend another $288 so that he could continue his time with her. To make a long story short, the waitresses continued to interrupt the party every ten minutes in the hopes of extracting more money.

This was how most of the strip clubs operated. The concept was always the same.

The only thing that changed was the amount of money that each club charged the customers to spend time with the dancers, and the type of action that the men did or didn't receive from the strippers.

I knew quite a few dancers who worked in clubs that blatantly advertised prostitution. There were actual backrooms in these types of places. They were nothing fancy. Most of the rooms weren't much more than a closet with a dirty old mat-tress thrown on the floor. The waitresses who worked at these types of clubs still interrupted the party every ten minutes to collect more money from the customers. It wasn't uncommon for a waitress to walk in on a dancer that was in the middle of having intercourse with a man. If the customer wasn't willing to spend any more money on the woman, the sex act came to an immediate halt and the dancer would simply get up, grab her clothes, and leave.

I worked at Ruby's for approximately two years. In the two years that I worked, I could count on one hand how many times I actually

went into the secluded area with a customer. The few times that I actually did go, turned out to be a total nightmare. Once the waitress collects the money from him, you were on your own until she returned. Many of the men were rough and very grabby. They were either trying to put their hands down your bra or try to go up underneath your skirt. It didn't take me very long to figure out that these men expected some kind of action. Most of the men who had paid to take me to the secluded area weren't very happy with me, because I wouldn't give them any sex.

My apathetic attitude toward prosperity irritated the manager. He just couldn't understand why somebody as attractive as me couldn't produce more money.

Casey felt that I had a bad attitude towards the customers and the entire business in general. He was right, I did. I simply couldn't condone white slavery, drugs, prostitution, and violence. Needless to say, my boss and I were at an impasse. I knew that I wasn't a "financial asset," but I didn't care. I was a "visual asset," end of story. I looked good on the stage and that was it. Casey tried every trick in the book to get me to conform to his way-out thinking. He attempted to turn me into a drug-addicted prostitute that he could abuse and control. However, his attempts to coerce me into his sordid world were to no avail. As time passed, Casey became more and more hostile towards me. "You don't belong in this fucking business," he screamed, "I'm going to do everything in my power to run you out of it." Casey didn't intimidate me like he did most of the women who worked for him. I just ignored his threats.

The owner of the Ruby Garter club was a very wealthy man who had owned other strip clubs in the past. I heard rumors that he was mob connected. I, like the other dancers that were employed at his club, never really knew whether these allegations were true. The affluent older man took a liking to me because I was one of the few dancers that he didn't have to worry about. He appreciated the fact that I wasn't a drug addict or a prostitute, and for this reason, I knew that my job was secure.

For the last year and a half, I had been sharing a motel suite with a dancer that I had befriended shortly after I began at the club. My roommate had just recently decided to transfer to the Ruby Garter's sister club after the FBI questioned her about the murder of a co-worker's husband. The Ruby Garter South was owned and operated by the same individuals that owned the Ruby Garter and was located forty-five minutes south of where I was currently working. My friend told me that she had rented a small studio apartment in an old house directly behind the club. This house belonged to one of the owner's business associates, and was primarily occupied by the dancers

employed at the South location.

About two weeks after my roommate moved, I asked the owner for a transfer to the other club, because I could no longer tolerate working for Casey. I had to get away from the man. On the night that I had decided to request the transfer, the owner didn't show up at the club until 2:30 a.m. He had business to attend to, so I wasn't able to speak with him until close to 3:30 a.m. When I finally spoke with him, I explained the situation between Casey and me and spared him no details.

By the time I was finished, he was absolutely furious with Casey and had agreed to the transfer. I thanked him profusely and left his office.

Around closing time, the dressing room was packed with naked women trying to get dressed so that they could go home. Because it was so crowded, I decided to wait until the dressing room cleared out before I went back in. Most of the dancers had gone home, and only a small handful of them remained in the dressing room. There were a couple of dancers sitting on the concrete steps outside waiting for their rides to pick them up.

The owner of the club was supposedly in his office counting the evening's proceeds. Casey was behind the bar closing out the register and emptying ashtrays.

The music had been shut off. The only sounds remaining were the clanging of glasses and the ringing of the register. While Casey was closing the club, I was busy emptying my locker. It took me approximately fifteen minutes to pack up my belongings. This was the last night that I would ever work at this club. I was to start working at the Ruby Garter South immediately.

The dancers that remained in the dressing room with me were busy drinking Southern Comfort and polishing their nails. The eerie silence of the club was abruptly broken by a large bang. At first the other women and I ignored the noise. Moments later, we heard blood-curdling screams coming from the foyer area of the club. Before we even had a chance to react, one of the dancers who had been sitting outside came crashing through the dressing room door. The woman was hysterical screaming for someone to call the police. I could hear Casey screaming in the background for someone to call a "fucking ambulance."

Apparently the owner had been stabbed in the back seven times by a strange man posing to be a customer.

Although outwardly calm, I was panicking inside. My immediate response to the situation was to flee. There was an emergency door located to the immediate left of the dancer's dressing room. I picked up my belongings, opened the door, and took off. Frantic, I ran thru

the pitch-black parking lot towards the direction of the motel where I lived. I could hear the screaming sirens racing down the highway as I fumbled in my jean pockets for the key to my room. As soon as I got into the room, I called a taxi and began to pack up my things. Because I was desperate to leave the immediate area, I lied that a family member was critically ill. The cab arrived in about ten minutes. My destination was Diana's house. I arrived at my friend's home at around 5:30 a.m. Diana and her mother were sound a sleep. I banged frantically on the kitchen door until I woke them. Diana and her mother were surprised to see me, and were completely shocked by what I told them. The three of us sat at the kitchen table and talked for awhile. Completely exhausted, I went into the living room and fell asleep on the couch.

When I awoke the next day, I called the club to find out what happened the night before. The manager answered the phone. He told me that the owner had died from the attack and that both the clubs would be closed for the next week. I wanted to find out all the details of the incident, so I went to the nearest drugstore to buy a newspaper. Sure enough, the story had made the front page.

I ended up spending the next four days with Diana. During that time, I racked my brain trying to figure out where I was going to live next. I remembered that a friend of mine had just recently been transferred up to the other club. She mentioned something about renting a room in a house behind the Ruby Garter South. I decided to call and ask if there were any more rooms available for rent.

My old roommate told me there were still several rooms available. I asked her for directions to the Ruby Garter South, and told her that I would be there by 6:00 p.m. that evening.

By 5:00 p.m., I had my bags packed and was ready to leave. I remember feeling sick inside as I dragged my severely worn luggage down the stairs and out into the driveway. My transient existence was beginning to take a toll on me. Nevertheless, I threw my baggage into the trunk of Diana's car, and off I went.

4. Ruby Garter South

The Ruby Garter South was located about sixty miles from where Diana lived.

Situated in a somewhat rural area, this club was certainly not an easy place to find. When we finally arrived at the club, neither one of us were pleased at what we saw. The club itself appeared old and depressing. A large beat-up sign on the front of the building read “Live X-Rated Entertainment” in bold-red letters. The word entertainment was spelled wrong. Directly to the left of the club was a small deserted looking grocery store. To the club’s right stood a tiny blue shack-like structure. There were two little dark-haired girls playing in the garbage cans behind the house.

We pulled into the gravel-filled parking lot and followed it around to the back of the club. An old white farmhouse with a dilapidated looking screened-in porch stood nearby. Toys, garbage, and rusted car parts were strewn all over the house’s weed-filled yard. I couldn’t believe that this slum was actually going to be my new home. By 8:00 that evening, I had rented one of the rooms and completely moved in.

By 7:00 p.m. the next day, I was more than ready to go to work. My sleeping room was extremely depressing and lonely. I couldn’t wait to leave. When I walked into the Ruby Garter South, I was even more disheartened. The interior smelled like decomposed garbage. The stage was quite large and over-powered the small room. The floors were nothing more than bare wooden planks, which were haphazardly nailed together. Directly behind the service bar was a maze-like area comprised of dark corridors and ghostly corners. This was the secluded area where the dancers took their paying customers.

This place could have given Alfred Hitchcock the creeps. The club’s employees were equally as frightening. This club was run with a small crew of six dancers, one haggard-looking waitress, and an apathetic thirty-nine year old doorman that claimed he used to ride with the Hells Angels. The dancers that worked at this club were ill kept and extremely unprofessional. I didn’t fit in, nor did I want to.

By the end of my first night at this club, I realized that I had made a serious mistake. I had already made up my mind that I was going to quit, and find work somewhere else. I just didn’t know where.

Although the women who worked at this club weren’t of my caliber, most of them were basically nice people, with the exception of one woman named Sara.

She lived in the small-blue shack located directly next door to the

club with her husband Samuel and their two small children. Sara was a tall large-boned woman with a face like the evil witch in the movie The Wizard of OZ. Unfortunately, Sara's appearance wasn't her ultimate worst feature. Her personality, what little there was of it, left a lot to be desired. Sara was a loner, and although she primarily stayed to herself, I still didn't like her. There was something quite odd about the woman, but I just didn't know what. To top it all off, she was seven months pregnant and dancing naked on the stage. I found it difficult to believe that any club owner would allow such a thing. But when I found out that it was Casey who was responsible for hiring her, it all made sense to me. Casey wasn't the most selective person that I had ever met. He didn't care about the quality of the women that he hired. All he cared about was the quantity. The more women that he could exploit, the happier he was.

I made very little money at this club. The customers were few and far between and primarily consisted of non-spending voyeurs and dirty-old men. I didn't have a car, so my choices of places to work at were extremely limited. However, there was another club directly north of the Ruby Garter South. The name of it was the Nite Strip Lounge. According to my ex-boss Casey, the owner of the Nite Strip Lounge had a violent temper and would physically abuse some of his female employees.

A typical night of work at the Ruby Garter South consisted of nothing more than drinking coffee and dancing on the stage for every drifter or pervert that was able to scrounge up the price of the admission. I could truly never get used to this place.

A month went by and Sara was due to have her baby. One of my co-workers decided to throw her a baby shower because she felt sorry for her. She invited me, and some of the other dancers to the occasion, but I declined the invitation. One of my co-workers, another naive soul, asked me if I would like to contribute twenty dollars towards the shower gift. The Good Samaritan that I was flat out refused. Three weeks after her baby shower, Sara gave birth to her child at home.

Supposedly, Sara's two-young daughters, who couldn't have been more than six years old assisted in the childbirth because Sara's husband was busy working on an important project. Two days after the birth of her child, Sara was back up on the stage stripping. A few of my colleagues and I were flabbergasted to say the least. After all, dancing on a stage nude two days after giving birth wasn't exactly the norm. Although it was none of my business, curiosity had gotten the better of me and I was dying to know why on earth this woman had returned to work so quickly.

One day after Sara had just gotten off the stage, I decided to go into the dressing room and initiate a conversation with the strange

woman. I began by asking her how the new baby was doing. It took her a few minutes to respond to my question. It was almost as if she needed some time to make up an answer. Finally she responded, but just barely. The ugly woman let out an exaggerated sigh. “The baby’s dead,” she casually remarked. I have to admit, her nonchalant response threw me for a loop. I looked at her in disbelief. “Dead from what?” I asked. “I don’t know. Possibly crib death or something,” she commented as she quickly grabbed her tacky-green mohair sweater and scurried out of the dressing room.

The door slammed shut behind her.

When my co-workers found out about the death of Sara’s baby, they were mortified. Some of them felt sorry for her, attributing her apathetic attitude towards her newborn’s death as simply part of the grieving process. I strongly disagreed.

As far as I was concerned, the woman wasn’t grieving; she just simply didn’t give a damn.

About one month after the death of Sara’s child, strange things began to take place at the club. Strip clubs were notorious for their loud music and this club was no exception. Most of the time, the music was so loud that you couldn’t even hear yourself talk. One night at around 1:00 a.m., a few of the other dancers and I thought that we heard a woman screaming out in the back parking lot. At first we just attributed the screams to some mischievous teenagers playing around, but night after night the screaming continued. One of the dancers who worked with me lived in the house that I was staying at. She had a German Shepard that had been fairly well behaved, until recently. The once well-behaved dog had become a menace, barking day and night at something or someone in Samuel and Sara’s house.

One evening, the mysterious screams that haunted the back parking lot of the club were louder than normal. Concerned, the doorman went outside into the parking lot to investigate. Ten minutes later he came back into the club reporting that he had seen nothing. The blood curdling screaming continued on and off for the next month. Time and time again the doorman would go out into the parking lot searching for the source of the elusive cries, but never found anything out of the ordinary.

This club closed considerably earlier than most. By 2:30 a.m., we were dressed and ready to leave. On occasion, some of the employees would stand around conversing and smoking cigarettes.

One night, I decided to join them. From the corner of my eye, I caught a glimpse of a man digging a ditch directly behind the little blue shack. Sara was standing across from me talking to one of the dancers. I thought that it was an opportune time to ask her why some man was digging ditches in her backyard at 2:30 a.m.

Sara snapped at me, “It’s just my husband doing some work for the landlord!”

“Well,” I sarcastically remarked, “he must have one good set of eyes.” Sara ignored my comment.

As time went on, a wooden building was erected behind Sara and Samuel’s house.

At the time, nobody gave it a second thought. As far as we were concerned, it was just another eye sore on their property. Shortly after the building appeared, the screaming seemed to disappear. The mysterious screams that we had once heard on a nightly basis were nothing but a memory.

After the owner at the Ruby Gartner died, Casey would stop by the Ruby Garter South on a fairly regular basis to check-up on the business. I did everything in my power to avoid him when he was around, but he still managed to make me miserable.

One night while Casey was in the back office doing paperwork, the strange screams returned. One of the dancers asked the doorman if he would mind going outside to investigate the noise one more time. The doorman was sick and tired of going on wild goose chases and refused to do it. He told the woman to report the incident to Casey. The naive young woman did as she was told. A few moments later, Casey came storming out of the office holding a large-black stick that strongly resembled a baseball bat. Casey flew out of the back exit door and disappeared into the pitch-black parking lot. Twenty minutes later, he returned and the exit door slammed closed behind him.

I could see Casey’s tall six foot seven silhouette approaching the little table where the dancers would sit between shows. He took the large black stick that he had been carrying and flung it against the wall directly over our heads. None of us moved. “Do any of you think that this place is some kind of a fucking joke?” he screamed. “This is a serious god damn business!” Casey kicked over the small table that we used to put our beverages on. Pop, coffee, and broken glass flew everywhere. The dancer who had reported the screaming to Casey had just walked onto the stage. When Casey saw her, he jumped up on the stage and began to beat the woman with his fists in front of all the employees and the customers. The woman fell to the floor from the intensity of the blows. Some of the dancers began to scream. Most of the customers got up and left. The badly beaten woman screamed for help, but nobody came to her aid. After Casey had knocked the woman practically unconscious, he ordered the doorman to get rid of her. The doorman, who wasn’t intimidated by Casey, suggested that he get rid of her himself. Casey dragged the semi-conscious girl into the women’s bathroom. We heard him order one of the waitresses to throw a blanket “over her ass.” The waitress went out to her car and

returned with a dirty looking old sheet, which she used to cover up the battered woman.

After Casey dragged the dancer into the bathroom, he walked over and informed us that he had an announcement to make. In a loud threatening voice, we were told that if we didn't like the way he operated, we could all get the hell out. Then Casey walked up to me and pointed his finger directly into my face and said,

"You're going to be the next bitch I get rid of." It's a good thing that I didn't have a gun when he made that comment. I probably would have put him out of his misery. His violent behavior and his threat were the last straw.

I intended to quit the Ruby Gartner and go to work at the Nite Strip Lounge.

After Casey stormed back into the office, I told my ex-roommate, Magdalene, where I was going. She asked me how I planned to get there without a car. I told her that I had intended to take a cab.

On my way to the hallway to use the payphone, I stopped and asked the doorman to lend me a couple of quarters to use the phone. The heavyset man reached deep into his pocket and handed me some change. I quickly fed the money into the hungry payphone. I had to dial information in order to get the number to the Nite Strip Lounge. The music that night was so loud that I could barely hear what the operator was saying. I wrote down the phone number that she gave me, and quickly made the call. The phone rang and rang, but nobody answered.

Finally, somebody picked up the phone, "Nite Strip Lounge, how may I help you?" The man's voice was soft spoken and sounded friendly. I told the man that I wanted to speak to the manager. "That would be me," the man said. I asked him if he was hiring any dancers at the time. He said that he was. I gave him my stage name, and told him that I would be there within the hour to talk to him.

After I hung up the phone, there was no doubt in my mind that I would be re-employed within the next couple of hours. The only thing I had left to do was get myself there. I didn't have a car, so my only option was to call a cab.

I remembered that I had a couple of quarters in my makeup bag that I kept in the dressing room. While I was searching through my cosmetics looking for the change, I heard somebody open the dressing room door. I glanced up to see who it was and there stood Sara in the doorway. "I overheard you telling Magdalene that you were going to the Nite Strip Lounge. My husband can give you a ride there if you want him to." My immediate reaction was to call her a sick bitch and tell her to mind her own business, but somehow I managed to restrain myself. I thought about it for minute and decided to take her up on

her offer for the sim-ple reason that it would be cheaper than taking a cab. Sara told me to hurry up and get ready to leave. She said that her husband would be waiting for me in the back of the club and that he would be driving a black Camero. Sara smiled revealing a set of tinged-yellow teeth. As she turned to leave the dressing room, she asked me not to tell anyone that her husband was giving me a ride to the Nite Strip Lounge. “I don’t want any problems with Casey,” she said. I lied and assured her that I wouldn’t tell a soul. As soon as I left the dressing room, I made it a point to tell Magdalene that Sara’s husband was going to give me a ride to the club, and I made sure that I said it loud enough for Sara to hear it.

Holding my suitcase in one hand and my makeup case in the other, I left the club via the emergency door that led to the back parking lot of the club. The emergency door that slammed closed behind me sounded like a prison gate. I stood in the pitch-black parking lot. It was extremely still outside that particular evening, and so quiet that you could hear a pin drop. There was no breeze of any kind, no movement and no noise. I looked around the parking lot for a car, but there wasn’t one. There was no sign of anyone around and certainly no black Camero.

The first thing that ran through my mind was that Sara had deliberately set me up.

I began to feel paranoia overcome me as my eyes nervously scanned the dark parking lot for a car. Finally, a dark-colored vehicle crept into the parking lot.

Whoever was driving the car didn’t have the headlights turned on. I watched the ominous vehicle slither around the corner of the club. The automobile began to move toward me. I could hear the sound of crackling gravel beneath the tires as the car approached the back of the parking lot. The snake like automobile stopped directly in front of me. From where I stood, I could see the shadowy silhouette of a man slouched behind the steering wheel of the car.

The faint sound of country western music drifted from the inside of the car. The dark silhouette of the man didn’t move or even so much as motion for me to get into the vehicle. I was leery about approaching the vehicle, but I wanted to be sure that the person driving the car was actually Sara’s husband before I got in.

From the car, a man’s voice with a southern accent softly called out my name.

Although I was apprehensive, I walked over to the passenger side of the car, and peered into the window at him. There sat a rather small man, somewhere in his late forties, with dark-wavy hair and a receding jaw line. The guy looked like a total creep. As he reached over to open the passenger door, the interior light of his car went on.

“Are you the young lady that needs a ride to the Nite Strip Lounge?” he asked. I nodded my head yes. He told me his name was Samuel and motioned for me to get into the car. Before I got into the vehicle, I glanced into the backseat and noticed that there was another person in the car. It was a little child. I opened up the passenger side of the car and got in. I intentionally didn’t lock the car door.

As we began to pull out of the parking lot, I asked Samuel if he knew the way to the Nite Strip Lounge. He nodded his head yes. He offered me a cigarette, which I politely refused. The highway was dark and entrenched with fog. The fog surrounding the car made me feel claustrophobic. Samuel turned his country western music way down to almost a whisper. I could hear his daughter munching on some potato chips.

I noticed that the interior of the car seemed to emit a foul odor that was indescribable. It was a strange musty smell that I was unfamiliar with. The smell was beginning to nauseate me, so I rolled the passenger side window down in hopes of diluting the stench. The damp highway air blowing directly in my face helped curb my nausea. I glanced out of the corner of my eye at Samuel. His eyes were firmly glued to the foggy highway, and his face was expressionless. I could still smell the peculiar odor that was coming from somewhere inside the car. In the most diplomatic way possible, I asked my chauffeur if he knew what the weird smell was. Samuel didn’t reply. He simply stared straight ahead as if he were in some sort of trance. His lack of response made me extremely uncomfortable. I knew that the Nite Strip Lounge was close and recognized the glowing sign at the gas station ahead. The little girl in the back seat had fallen asleep. Now it was just Samuel, the fog, and me. He reached across my lap to open his glove compartment and took out a pack of cigarettes. Once again he asked me if I wanted one.

Once more, I declined. This time, my refusal to smoke put a smile on his face.

Out of the clear blue sky he answered my question about the odor. “You know little Jill back there,” he pointed to the sleeping child lying in the back seat, “she spilled some milk or something. Guess no one bothered to wipe it up. Spoiled milk smells, you know. Can’t get rid of that smell.” I didn’t reply to his explanation of the strange smell. At this point, I no longer cared. All I wanted to do was to get away from him.

Finally, we arrived at the intersection of where the club was located. The building was encased in fog making it difficult to see. Flashing red neon lights danced pro-vocatively on the marquee drawing attention to the dark building. I instructed Samuel to drop me off at the far end of the parking lot. “It’s dark out here. Sure you want

to walk that far?" the strange man asked me. "I'll take my chances," I replied. The homely man nodded his head. He had the audacity to ask me if I wanted him to pick me up later. I politely but firmly refused his offer. Samuel slowly pulled into the large parking lot of the Nite Strip Lounge, and stopped the car. I reached into the back seat and quickly gathered up my things, trying not to disturb the sleeping child.

5. Nite Strip Lounge

As I walked through the parking lot to the entryway of the Nite Strip Lounge, I was able to hear music. It wasn't the typical upbeat type of music that one would expect to hear in a strip club, but rather a sad yet seductive type of melody capable of beckoning the most innocent of souls. When I opened the door that led into the club, the intense flashing red and green lights blinded me. A small group of men holding large, black-metal flashlights were gathered around a dimly lit cigarette machine. Their faces grossly distorted by the unflattering green lights. I approached the men, and asked one of them if they knew where the manager was.

A classy looking man with a showbiz smile stepped forward and introduced himself as the manager. I smiled and told him that I was the person who he had spoken with earlier regarding a job. He introduced himself as Monty and asked if I would accompany him to the office. He asked me a few general questions about myself and then told me that I was hired. The whole process couldn't have taken more than ten minutes. Before I left the office, I was informed that the owner at the club, a man by the name of Vince Roth, would also be interviewing me within the next couple of days. I had heard quite a few negative reports concerning this man from my ex-employers and a handful of dancers that worked at the Nite Strip Lounge in the past. Vince Roth had a reputation for being physically abusive to his employees. I chose to ignore these allegations simply because I needed to believe that anything had to be better than where I had just come from.

As it turned out, I was wrong. I learned in time that there was no such thing as a strip club utopia.

As I left the office, I asked Monty if I could use the payphone to call myself a cab to get back home. He let me use the one behind the bar. Fifteen minutes later my taxi showed up. Monty escorted me to the cab and handed the taxi driver a crisp fifty-dollar bill. "Take good care of this pretty young lady," the manager said. I thanked Monty for the cab fare and headed home.

The events of the previous evening had definitely taken a toll on me. I was upset and physically exhausted from all the stress. Because I didn't get to sleep until 5:30 a.m., I intended to sleep for at least twelve hours that day. Unfortunately, my plan to sleep the day away was disrupted at noon by the sounds of police sirens. At first, I assumed there must have been a traffic accident in front of the club. I ignored the noise and managed to fall back to sleep only to be awoken again by someone banging on the front door of the house. I reluctantly

got out of bed to investigate the noise. Half asleep and in a very bad mood, I forced myself to go downstairs to answer the door.

I was greeted by two police officers that simultaneously flashed their badges at me. One of the officers ordered me to step outside. I tried to keep my anger in check and cooperated with the police. I wanted them to leave so I could go back to sleep. From the front porch of the house, I could see that the entire parking lot was choked with squad cars. I asked the officers what was going on, but they told me that they weren't at liberty to divulge any information. The two men began to interrogate me. I was asked quite a few questions about myself, the Ruby Garter Club, and the employees that worked there. The police seemed to be particularly interested in the small-blue house that was situated directly next to the club.

They asked me if I knew who the residents of the house were. I lied and told the police that I had no idea who lived in that particular house. Although I knew that Sara and Samuel resided there, I chose to withhold the information. I didn't want to get involved because I had enough of my own problems. The police suggested that I might want to find somewhere else to live temporarily. A roadblock had been erected in front of the club to block traffic. Apparently, the club and its immediate surroundings would be off limits until further notice.

By the time the officers had finished talking to me, I was determined to move out of the house as soon as possible. I wasn't sure what was going on, but whatever it was, I didn't want to be bothered with it. I had enough problems of my own. I ended up renting a cheap little motel room at a place called the Green Oaks Oasis. Located directly next door to a truck stop, the Green Oaks served as a haven for prostitutes, drug addicts, and suicide victims. The motel was also within walking distance to the Nite Strip Lounge. By 4:00 p.m., I had moved all my belongings into the small, musty smelling motel room. I had a couple of hours to kill before I had to be at work. As usual, I elected to spend time sleeping.

Fully clothed in my stripper garb with sweatshirt and jeans over it, I lay down on the hard-uncomfortable bed and slept until it was time to leave.

My first night at the infamous Nite Strip Lounge was a learning experience to say the least. The last two clubs that I had worked for seemed rinky dinky in comparison. The men that frequented this club were big spenders. They didn't spend hundred of dollars on the dancers, they spent thousands.

The management team at this club trained the dancers to be some of the best hustlers in the business. They actually went as far as to hold weekly classes designed to teach the dancers the fine art of deception. Both the management and the waitresses facilitated these

classes. It was expected that the floor men, bartenders, and doormen also attend. During the classes, the managers would pose as customers. The dancers had to take turns role-playing with them, and in turn portrayed customers that were cheap, abusive, demanding, and even violent.

Management made sure that each and every dancer was capable of separating money from the male patrons in very short periods of time without delivering any sexual favors. The dancers would rehearse these scenarios over and over again until they were perfected. It wasn't unusual for these training sessions to last as long as four hours.

Waitresses at the Nite Strip Lounge played an important role in separating patrons from their money. Twenty years ago, the only way that a woman could become a waitress was if she was an ex-stripper. The waitresses that were employees at the Nite Strip Lounge used to work in the strip clubs on Chicago's infamous Rush Street, before they were all shut down. The Rush Street clubs employees and managers were notorious for slipping a "mickey" into the customer's drink to knock them out. Once the customer was sufficiently drugged, they were usually beaten and robbed. These experienced con artists fled to the suburban strip clubs shortly after the Rush Street clubs had been closed down, and were commonly referred to as "bust-out waitresses." They collected the majority of the money that filtered through the clubs. Their main purpose was to coerce the customers into spending all their cash. After the customer's cash fund had been exhausted, they went after the man's credit cards. It wasn't uncommon for customers to spend thousands of dollars on every single credit card they had in exchange for the company of one of the dancers. The credit card vouchers that the customers signed were imprinted with a fictitious business name such as J&R

Banquet or Phillip G. Furriers. Married men and businessmen alike were able to deceive their spouses and employers with this system. The club owners benefited by being able to dupe the credit card companies and the IRS. The waitresses were also the club owner's "Personal Girl Fridays" who acted as both informant and confidant for management. The waitresses had the power to make or break a dancer by either favoring or ostracizing them.

Because there was often illegal activity at most strip clubs, they were constantly under the threat of being busted or raided by the authorities. In a police raid, the waitresses were usually arrested and charged with pandering or pimping. Pandering in the state of Illinois is considered to be a felony charge. The dancers that were arrested during the raid were charged with solicitation of prostitution. In most cases, these charges were dropped because this was a misdemeanor in Illinois.

The waitresses made a considerable amount of money. Some of them probably made well over $100,000 a year, but rarely were their positions sought after by the dancers because of the legal ramifications. Some of the antics that the waitresses used were unscrupulous to say the least. If a customer would cry broke to the waitress after she had solicited him to go into the private area with her, she would virtually frisk him from head to toe looking for his money. This practice consisted of emptying the man's pants, jacket, and shirt pocket. The waitresses especially checked the seasoned strip club junkies' socks, soles, and heels of their boots and shoes for hidden compartments with money stashed in them. Customer's wallets were literally seized from their hands and pant pockets and searched for cash, checks, or credit cards. If any cash was found, the waitresses would confiscate it regardless of the customer's protest. She would either pocket it for herself or split it with the dancer.

Watching the waitresses in action was very entertaining. They were excellent mentors and I learned a lot about the business through them. However, these women couldn't be trusted. On top of being hard-core hustlers, they were well-seasoned thieves. Nobody was exempt from their scams, not even the dancers.

As far as the dancers themselves were concerned, the quality of the women who worked at the Nite Strip Lounge far exceeded those that I had worked with in the past. These women were much more attractive, polished, and professional. Their costumes were absolutely gorgeous, richly adorned with sequins, rhinestones, and beads. Many of the dancers had their costumes custom made by well-known wardrobe designers from Las Vegas. The cost of some of these gowns well exceeded $2,000, which in many cases didn't include all the matching under pieces. All of the dancers wore expensive four to five inch high heels on stage. The shoes were seductive and very glitzy. Most of them drove expensive cars: Cadillacs, Lincolns, Mercedes, and Porches were the automobiles of choice.

The club's rules were strictly enforced. That was made clear on the first night that I began there. They were the same as in most clubs —no accepting tips, no prostitution, and no quoting prices. The rules didn't stop there. We were required to work six days a week, with no exceptions. To take a day off, we were required to submit a request four weeks in advance. There was no such thing as calling in sick. Mr. Roth expected his employees to come to work regardless of how bad they felt. Anyone who didn't abide by these rules was fired.

The dancers weren't allowed to hang out in the dressing room. The waitresses and dancers were restricted from socializing with one another as a desperate attempt to discourage the employees from stealing. It wasn't unusual for the dancers and waitresses to

collaborate against management. If the waitress and the dancer worked together as a team, their earning potential could easily increase by 100%. This scam was by no means difficult. If a customer spent a considerable amount of money to take one of the dancers into the secluded area, all the waitress had to do was turn in a believable portion of the cash to the bar and pocket the rest. The proceeds were then split between the waitress and the dancer at the end of the night. It wasn't uncommon for the plotting pairs to walk away with a couple thousand extra dollars apiece. The dancers were also not allowed to take any breaks as long as there were customers in the room.

We're required to work the floor over and over again soliciting each and every customer sometimes ten to fifteen times a night. The drill would continue until the customers either broke down and spent their money, or became angry at the constant badgering and left. According to the manager who went by the name of Monty, Mr. Roth ran the club with an iron fist. There was a tremendous amount of pressure put on the dancers to produce.

A few days after I started to work at the Nite Strip Lounge, I was introduced to a young blonde woman clad in a skimpy-black cocktail dress. The attractive woman referred to herself as Lara. Lara was very friendly and outgoing. Before long, we were engaged in conversation. Lara had just started to work at the club a couple of weeks prior to my arrival, and she was currently residing at the same motel that I was. During our conversation, Vince Roth's name was brought up.

Lara asked me if I had the pleasure of meeting him yet. I told her I hadn't. Lara laughed and shook her head. "The guy is a real prick," she said, "I just stay out of his way. There's a high turnover rate here. A lot of the dancers can't take him."

Lara took a sip of her coffee, "you'll see what I mean." I wasn't surprised by what she told me. I had heard other negative reports about this man before, but I didn't care. As far as I was concerned, even Charles Manson would have been an improvement over the last creep I had worked for.

I glanced at the clock that hung on the wall behind the bar. It was practically midnight and my turn to dance. The club was packed to its full capacity that was somewhere around 200 people. The stage in this club was huge and quite elaborate, and I wasn't used to dancing on it yet. Clad in a skin-tight, gold lame gown, I slowly walked up to the stage. My music began to play. I always danced to the same type of music, the blues. I could feel the eyes of the customers taking in every part of my body as I sauntered seductively across the stage to Janis Joplin's version of "Ball and Chain." On my third song, I was naked except for my rhinestone g-string and gold-spiked high heeled shoes. Suddenly the music abruptly stopped. For some reason my show was

cut short. Embarrassed, I immediately left the stage. As I walked down the staircase that led back into the dressing room, I heard a woman calling my name. It was one of the waitresses. She instructed me to get dressed because Vince Roth was waiting to see me. My time had come to meet the supposed tyrant. I quickly got dressed and left the dressing room.

Cat whistles and obscene remarks followed me as I walked through the crowded room. When I arrived at Mr. Roth's office, the door was partially closed. I decided to knock instead of walking right in. A gruff voice ordered me to come in. I opened up the office door slowly. Mr. Roth was sitting behind a large, black-metal desk reading a newspaper. "Have a seat," he said with his eyes still glued to the paper. I chose to remain standing. I have to admit, I was expecting to see a man much younger. Mr. Roth was easily in his mid-sixties and had the looks and demeanor of a mobster. He was a very tall robust man and wore his jet-black wavy hair in a long ponytail. He had a very dark tan and was dressed entirely in black. The first four buttons of his shirt were unfastened revealing a very substantial gold chain that hung down his chest. A lit cigar was carefully positioned in a red plastic ashtray atop the huge floor safe.

Vince Roth read the paper for a few more minutes. Then the large man shook his head as if he were in total disgust. He shoved the newspaper across the desk in my direction. In the most abrasive tone that I had ever heard, he began to speak. "Are you out of your fucking mind working for some lunatic like this!" I have to say Mr. Roth's congenial greeting totally caught me off guard. My first reaction was to tell this caustic bastard to go to hell, but I managed to keep my mouth shut only because I was desperate for a job.

When Mr. Roth continued to speak, if that's what you want to call it, it sounded more like yelling. "That god damn idiot was so desperate for dancers that he had to hire a fucking murderer." Totally confused, I asked him to tell me what he was talking about. He reached into the drawer of his desk and pulled out a fresh cigar.

Once again the man raised his voice to me. "What do you mean, what am I talking about? Don't you read the fucking newspaper?" He pointed to the newspaper that he shoved across the desk at me a few minutes earlier. The dancer who had warned me about Mr. Roth was absolutely right. By the looks of things, he was certainly everything she had described him to be and then some. "I must have forgotten to pick up this morning's copy," I sarcastically replied, "so do you mind if I take a look at yours."

"Be my guest," he snapped, "I've got to make a phone call anyways." Mr. Roth began to frantically dial the phone, but apparently whomever he was trying to reach wasn't answering the

phone or wasn't answering it fast enough for him. Vince Roth slammed the receiver down violently.

"Stupid son of a bitch," he said, "I'll be right back." When the tyrant stood up from the desk, I could see he easily stood 6 feet 4 inches tall.

As soon as he left the office, I began to read the opened page of the newspaper.

There it was, jumping out at me in big black bold letters. "Man and woman arrested and charged with the alleged murders of several unidentified women."

To the left of the newspaper article was a picture of a grungy-looking middle-aged man. For some reason, the man's face looked familiar to me. I kept reading and then it hit me! "Sara and Samuel Bebson of Louisville, Kentucky, were apprehended last evening at their home." This was the strange couple that lived in the blue shack next door to the Ruby Garter South. Apparently, this couple had been sexually torturing women in their home for months. The deceased women were thought to be hitchhikers who made the grim mistake of accepting a ride with these cold-blooded people. The article continued to describe the grisly findings. The police discovered a soundproof building in back of their property that had apparently been used as a torture chamber of sorts.

One of the women that were held captive managed to escape from the wooden shack and made her way to a nearby police department. The police escorted the young woman back to the scene of the crime where further investigation uncovered a woman's body that had been buried underneath a junk car. I was mortified, but not entirely surprised, because I had a bad feeling about the couple to begin with.

The most frightening part was knowing that I had actually accepted a ride to the Nite Strip Lounge from a killer. A few minutes after I finished reading the article, Mr. Roth returned to the office. He resumed his position behind the desk and lit up his cigar. "Just tell me one thing," he said, "What was a classy broad like you doing working for a dope like Casey?" I laughed at the man's question. He was so crass that he was actually amusing. This was the question that ultimately broke the ice between this reputed tyrant and me. I gave Mr. Roth a quick review of what I had experienced while working in the last two clubs. As our conversation continued, I learned that he and the late owner of the Ruby Garter Club had been business adversaries for years.

During the 1970's and the 1980's there was an abundance of strip clubs in the Chicagoland area. Club owners were extremely competitive with one another.

The Nite Strip Lounge had a reputation for having the most beautiful women and sharpest hustlers in all of the Chicagoland area. It wasn't uncommon for club owners to try to recruit each other's top performers. Dancers were often lured away from their current employers with the promise of considerably higher earnings at another club. Club owners recruited each other's dancers by sending in their doorman or managers to pose as a customer. The undercover recruits would spend several hours watching the show, both on the stage and off. After hours of observation, they would flag down the dancers that interested them and extend offers of employment.

Some of the strip club owners attempted to control the dancers by threatening to have them black balled from every other club in the Chicagoland area. Some of the dancers were intimidated by this practice and never attempted to leave. The more defiant women simply quit and took their chances.

Vince Roth was famous for black balling his employees and he openly admitted it. If one of his dancers left to work for one of his competitors, he would call the club owner and tell him not to hire her because she was caught stealing or prostituting. Besides black balling the dancers, Mr. Roth could be terribly abusive to his employees and no one was exempt. Not even his managers or business partners escaped his wrath. He went through a lot of dancers because of his foul mouth and explosive temper. If you were a sensitive person, you were definitely working for the wrong man.

It was hell working for a person like this. Just about every other word that left his mouth was foul. As far as he was concerned, everybody was a "fucking prick" or a "fucking idiot." Mr. Roth had a definite presence about him that many people found intimidating, and he knew it.

In spite of all of his negative attributes, and believe me there were many, Mr. Roth was a shrewd businessman. He knew the business inside and out and had what it took to make a fortune. Although many disliked him, he was the most competent club owner that I had ever met. As I got to know him, I found that beneath all the layers of garbage was a very wise and sometimes even humane man. Unfortunately, his few redeeming qualities rarely surfaced.

Vince Roth had one quality that set him apart from all the other club owners that I had ever worked for. Most club owners thrived on the misfortunes of their employees, but Vince was different. He wasn't oblivious to the pit falls of the business and always encouraged the dancers to save their hard earned money.

He had a lot of pet peeves, but the one that bothered him the most was when women would surrender their hard-earned money to their pimps or parasitic significant others. Of all the dancers that

worked at Nite Strip Lounge, at least half of them had a pimp or something equivalent sucking them dry of their money.

Saturday night was our designated payday. Our pay was put in little brown envelopes with our names written on them. We were paid in cash and the amount of the money in the envelopes usually exceeded $2,000. The dancers that had pimps weren't allowed to take out even a penny from their pay envelopes without the consent of their pimps. Most of these women owned very few clothes outside of their stage costumes. Many of them wore second-hand clothes from thrift stores.

A prime example of this was a thirty-six year old woman who had a master's degree. She was very pretty and considered to be a top producer. This woman made over $4,000 a week, but in inclement weather she would come into work with a horse blanket wrapped around her. She didn't even own a winter coat. Her pimp, on the other hand, wore a full-length mink.

The first time I saw Vince Roth lose his temper was on a Saturday night. It was approximately four o'clock in the morning. Most of the dancers were in the dressing room getting ready to go home. I was standing at the bar drinking my last cup of coffee for the evening. When Vince went to the front door to throw his cigarette butt out, he happened to see a plethora of pimps lined up in their cars waiting for their girlfriends to get off work. Furious, Vince immediately called a meeting with all of the dancers and absolutely forbid them to allow their pimps to pick them up at the club in the future. He ended the meeting by telling us that if we didn't like it, we could leave. One of the dancers, whose pimp was waiting for her outside, became angry and told Vince that she was going to quit and walked out the door. He stormed out after her and began to beat the woman in the parking lot. He knocked her to the ground, tore her purse from her shoulder, reached inside and pulled out the brown envelope that held her pay for the week. Vince took the money, shoved it into his back pocket, and threw the empty envelope at one of the pimp's Eldorados. The beaten dancer's pimp pulled out of the parking lot leaving the blood-covered woman to fend for herself.

Vince stormed back into the club waving a fist full of money at all of us. "If I ever see anymore of your pimps waiting for you outside of this fucking club again; you're out of here!" Then he started to yell at his manager calling him a "stupid fucking jag off" for hiring the woman to begin with.

Anyone who works for Vince learns that the best thing to do when he becomes explosive is to ignore him. Any attempt to argue or pacify him was futile. There was no doubt about it; Vince was an extremely difficult person to work for. He worked us hard and forced

us to make money even when we didn't want to. "You lazy broads will never make this kind of money again!" he would shout. At the time, all of us thought that he was just an obsessive slave driver. But in hindsight, I now realize that the man was right.

Vince was a creature of habit. Every Monday he would show up at the club at about 8:00 p.m., just like clockwork. Dressed to the hilt in his newest ensemble, he would strut around the club showing off his new clothes to all of the dancers while reminding us that his new suit and shoes cost more than we "stupid broads" made in a week. When he was done making a spectacle of himself, he would go behind the bar and check the books to see how much money the club had made while he was away. If he wasn't satisfied with the proceeds, he began to scream at the bartenders and the manager blaming them for the decline in business.

After Vince had finished yelling at all of us because we didn't bring in enough money, he would ask the night manager if any "new broads" had started. If the manager said yes, Vince would go get himself a cup of coffee and stand by the bar watching each and every woman dance. If the manager hired a dancer that Vince didn't approve of, all hell would break loose.

The first thing that he would do was to confront the manager. "Did you hire that ugly fucking horse-face up on the stage?" The poor manager couldn't even get a word in edge wise. "I want you to fire her right now!" he demanded. If the manager didn't respond fast enough, Vince would fire the woman himself. Sometimes he would literally pull her off the stage in the middle of her show, and he didn't care if there were 10 or 200 people in the club when he did it. It wasn't bad enough that he had completely humiliated the dancer in front of everyone, but to add insult to injury, he wouldn't even allow her to change out of her costume before he threw her and all of her belongings out into the parking lot. The poor woman, who didn't have a car or took a taxicab to the club, was forced to walk down the highway to the nearest truck stop to take refuge. Once Vince was convinced that he had successfully berated the dancer that he had just thrown out, he was as happy as a lark. This was the neurotic Vince Roth, nice one minute and completely out of control the next. But even Vince had his "pets" or favorite dancers that he never abused. Fortunately for me, I was one of those few. Vince laid off the dancers that didn't engage in drugs, alcohol, or prostitution. He did have one complaint about me though. He absolutely couldn't understand why I didn't make as much money as the rest of the women who worked for him. The reason why I wasn't as productive as some of the other dancers was because I hated having to deal with the customers.

Vince would always threaten to send me back to work at the

Ruby Garter Club if I didn't straighten out. "I don't get it," he would say to me, "the most beautiful broad in the whole damn place and you make the least amount of money. I'm going to make a top mixer out of you if it's the last thing I do." Vince did ultimately succeed in turning me into a top producer, but not while I worked for him. I didn't utilize my hustling skills until years later.

There were several tragic events that took place at the Nite Strip Club during the time that I worked there. A young woman who had worked at the club for five years went home one evening and shot herself in the head after being abruptly fired by Vince. When he received the news of the woman's death, he was devastated. About five months later, another woman was found dead on the dressing room floor with an apparent overdose of sleeping pills. Margarita, a very pretty woman in her early twenties was found murdered in the parking lot of the apartment building that she lived in. Her murderer, as far as I know, was never apprehended.

There were also two women who died suddenly from inoperable cancer. One of the women who died was a diagnosed schizophrenic. She made between $3,000 to $4,000 a week, and saved every dime. She gave it all to her poverty-stricken siblings and parents. Callie, as I knew her, lived in her car and ate out of garbage cans. Her clothes consisted of hand me downs and rags. The only decent clothing she owned were the extravagant costumes she needed to wear on the stage. One day, Callie became seriously ill. She died from leukemia eight months later. Vince definitely had a soft spot for this woman and took it very hard when she died.

Rumor had it that he sent several thousand dollars to her family as a token of his sympathy.

Shortly after Callie died, gossip surfaced that Vince was in the process of opening up another strip club on the west coast. As time went on, we saw less and less of him. He no longer came in to deliberately torment us like he used to. A few months later, we found out that Vince was selling his half ownership of the club to his silent business partner. Vince Roth was on a new track. The Nite Strip Club wasn't enough for him anymore. The millionaire was dead set on becoming even wealthier.

Before he left Illinois, he stopped into the club to say goodbye. He tried to coerce the dancers into working for him at his new club. Most of them declined, but a few of the very young unestablished girls jumped at his offer.

While Vince was busy saying goodbye to all his employees, I went into the dressing room to get ready to go on stage. I was up to dance next. From the stage, I could see Vince's tall silhouette amongst all the people who were probably relieved to see him go. I remember that I

was on my last song, which meant that I was practically nude. All of a sudden, I could hear the sound of Vince's thundering voice over the loud speaker. "Hey blondie," he yelled into the micro-phone, "get off the fucking stage and get in the dressing room." My music was abruptly stopped. I wrapped a see thru black chiffon veil around me and immediately left the stage. A few moments later, the dressing room door flung open. It was Vince Roth. "You're the biggest pain in my ass that ever crossed my path," he said. I laughed and gave him a brief hug goodbye. "Make sure you save your money blondie." The powerful man turned around to leave the dressing room.

"I'll be back to see you someday," he said. The dressing room door slammed closed behind him.

After Vince's departure, things began to change rapidly at the club. The Nite Strip Lounge went from being run with an iron fist to virtually no management at all. Many of the original dancers quit and there were only a few of Vince Roth's original employees left. Vince's business partner didn't make a particularly good manager. He spent very little time at the club and took no interest in how the operation was run.

Slowly, the quality of the dancers began to plummet from beautiful show girls to any average run of the mill female that was willing to take off her clothes. Because of lackadaisical management, prostitution and drugs slowly began to infiltrate the club, and nobody seemed to care as long as the cash registers kept ringing. That was the downside to the situation. The upside was that a lot of the pressure once put on the dancers to produce had stopped. This worked out well for many of us who really didn't care about producing to begin with.

I ended up working at this club eight more years after Vince sold out, so I worked a total of eleven years at the Nite Strip Lounge. By now it was 1984 and business was booming. Credit card sales in the club had become the payment of choice for most of the male patrons that frequented the Chicagoland area strip clubs. Once in a while, a man would come in with a substantial amount of cash. One day, an old pathetic drunk wandered into the club with approximately $40,000 on him.

The man claimed that he was dying and just wanted to have one last good time.

Because the man's appearance was offensive, none of the other dancers would talk to him. I was bored, so I decided to go over to where the old man was sitting and joined him. He bought me a dancer's cocktail and tipped the waitress $100.

When I realized how much money he had, I immediately summoned another dancer to assist me in getting this smelly old man to spend all of his money. The other dancer and I were able to talk

him into spending a huge amount of money for nothing more than conversation at the table.

The manager was getting upset because he knew the customer was spending a lot of money and not getting anything in return. He sent four other dancers to the table to join the party. These women didn't work the same way I did. They immediately began to fondle the man and let him play with their breasts at the table. The four women ended up taking the elderly man to the secluded area in the back of the room. One of the dancers went into the dressing room and returned with a large white fur rug that she used up on the stage. She put the rug down on the floor and in no time succumbed to the old man's every sexual desire.

Prostitution ran rampant at most of the clubs, and there was a lot of competition between the professional hustlers and the hookers. It remained that way throughout the rest of my dancing career.

Although prostitution was covertly tolerated in most of the clubs, there was still an opportunity for a dancer like me to make money. The women who chose to prostitute very rarely made more money than the professional hustlers who gave the men nothing. The prostitutes had what they considered to be a logical explanation for giving the customers what they wanted. These women felt that it was easier to have sex with the men than to con them out of their money. It was easier for the prostitutes to give them the sex that they wanted, earning less money, and going on to the next.

In order for me to continue to work in this business, I would either have to resort to prostitution, which wasn't an option, or buckle down and start utilizing the methods of extracting money from the customers that my ex-employer Vince Roth had instilled in me years ago. This meant that I had to focus on making money while I was at work. Which was something that I never did in the past. I never applied myself. I just made enough money to get by, but things were going to be different now. I was somewhere in my mid-thirties at this time. The hands of time were turning and not even I could elude them. Instead of going to the club every night and dwelling on how much I hated being there, I concentrated on making as much money as I could for eight hours a night. My new approach began to pay off. Before long I went from an average producer to a top money-maker, and true professional in what I did best: act.

While most women my age were engaged in some kind of a career and raising a family, I was busy thinking of new and resourceful ways to extract as much money as I could from the customers. Sometimes I would resort to some pretty bizarre schemes in order to get the customers to spend their money. On occasion, I would call another dancer in if I thought the man might be a big spender.

There were basically four different types of customers that slithered through the doors of the strip clubs and I had a different approach for all of them. The four categories were disloyal married men, maladjusted introverts, hard-core sex perverts, and psychopaths.

The married men category was the largest and undoubtedly the most lucrative one. Married men are the lifeblood of most sex enterprises in spite of what their wives may think or want to believe. Without the patronage of "happily married men," the sex industry would have surely collapsed hundreds of years ago. Sadly enough, most of these men would have sold their souls for the opportunity to have sex with somebody other than their wives. The sad part about it all was that a lot of them did. Married men were notorious for haunting their favorite X-rated place during their lunch breaks, or directly after work. It was for this reason that most strip clubs began to have a day shift that usually started at 11:30 a.m. and ended at 7:00 p.m. when the night shift came in. In most instances, the wives of these individuals were clueless as to their husbands' whereabouts. The average woman would never suspect their wayward spouse of patronizing strip clubs behind their back.

Many married men squandered away huge amounts of money on exotic dancers in the hopes of having sex with them. The irony is that these men end up spending ten or even twenty times more money on a stripper who won't give him anything, but a lick and a promise, than on a prostitute who would give him the sex that he wanted.

The category of socially maladjusted introverts was an interesting one. These were the men who lived alone and had virtually no social life other than their jobs. Many of them had never been in a relationship with a woman outside of a detached prostitute. Their entire social life revolved around strip clubs. The good thing about these men was that they were very free with their money and relatively easy to lead on for long periods of time without any sex. The downside was that when you were through with them, they were hard to get rid of and had a tendency to resort to stalking.

Hard core sex perverts were the sickest of the sick, but probably the most profitable. Their fetishes were the pinnacle of their pathetic existence absorbing most of their thoughts and free time. This group of men engaged in everything from necrophilia, the practice of having sex with the dead, to dismemberment of their body parts for the sake of a sexual climax. They were sadists, masochists, and child or animal molesters. The list of bizarre perversions was endless.

Although most of these men were single, an alarming number of them had spouses who condoned their partner's perversions. Many of them had open marriages, and were involved in swinger organizations, and sex clubs. Their favorite past time was frequenting

strip clubs, adult bookstores, peep shows, and orgy parties.

Last but not least were the psychopaths. These people had very little connection with the human race outside of a few family members or unsuspecting friends.

They were predators, stalkers, peeping toms, and loners. Men like these prefer to remain anonymous, and gravitated to the darkest holes that strip clubs had to offer. They very rarely spent large amounts of money on the dancers.

Although these men's sexual appetites varied considerably, they all sought to achieve the same thing: a sexual climax. Over time I was able to control and manipulate every classification of creep that one could possibly imagine by creating the illusion of being their sexual confidant. The more bizarre the men were—the more money I made. Eventually, I became indifferent toward even the most disturbing of sexual practices. These included self-mutilation of the genitals and sexual crucifixion, to name a few. Becoming emotionally disconnected was considered to be a working hazard for most strippers and prostitutes. I never considered my apathetic attitude problematic. As far as I was concerned, it was a blessing. My biggest issue was that I chronically felt disconnected from myself. I felt as if I was operating outside of my body. I treated myself as if I didn't exist.

A few more years had managed to slip by, and I still had done nothing worth-while or constructive with my life outside of saving some very hard-earned money. I was still working four nights a week at the club and sleeping my life away whenever I could. Although I had made quite a few friends, my life still primarily consisted of working, sleeping, and spending large amounts of money at expensive shops. Occasionally, I would join a few of the other dancers and go on shopping sprees. These sprees consisted of spending the day at an upscale retail mall. Money was no object, so we could afford to buy ourselves whatever we wanted. Perfume worth $300, $50 lipsticks, expensive jewelry, clothes, and lingerie were our primary purchases. The trinkets that we bought distracted us from the type of work we did, but the satisfaction that we derived from our self-indulgence was soon forgotten the moment we walked back through the doors of the club. Our depression resurfaced and served as a constant reminder that you can't put a band-aid on misery.

Practically all of the dancers I had ever known succumbed to some type of self destructive vice in order to escape their problems. My vice was sleeping, but most of the women resorted to drugs and alcohol. The effect was short lived regardless of what methods of relief you chose. Many of the dancers drank excessively at work or engaged in some sort of drug use. Cocaine, heroin, valium and prescription sleeping pills were the most commonly abused substances. The women

who chose to oblige themselves with drugs and alcohol didn't function well on the job. The more passive women could typically be found passed out in the women's bathroom, while others spent a majority of their evening instigating fights with their coworkers or acting out in some other type of violent way.

Eventually sleeping as a means of escape was no longer a viable option for me. I began having violent reoccurring dreams that always revolved around death, murder, and dangerous men. Some of these dreams were premonitions, foretelling me of some type of future tragedy or impending unpleasantness… that invariably came true.

I found these haunting dreams to be quite disturbing. There was one dream in particular that I will never forget. I dreamt that my ex-employer Vince Roth had come to pay me a visit at work. He arrived at the club in a large black expensive looking automobile. The vehicle was a hearse.

Four nights later, I was called out of the dressing room by one of the waitresses who informed me that I had a visitor. When I asked the waitress who it was, she said that she had no idea because she had never seen the man before. I figured that it was probably another one of my unsatisfied customers seeking retribution.

I took my sweet time leaving the dressing room. After all, I was in the middle of doing something important like putting on another coat of mascara. Suddenly, the dressing room door flew open, and through the reflection of the mirror, I saw a man enter. Startled, I quickly turned around to see who it was. At first I thought it was a customer, but I soon realized it was none other than Vince Roth.

I was absolutely shocked, because I hadn't seen the man in close to five years.

Vince still had the same commanding presence about him, but something about him had changed. Gone were the dark tan and the expensive gold necklaces that used to hang down his chest. He looked considerably older and worn. He was casually dressed and wore a black berretta styled jacket that was much like the one he wore years before. "Let's blow this pop stand," he said in his usual abrasive tone of voice. "I want to talk to you." When I left the dressing room, I found Vince sitting at a table in the back of the room smoking a cigarette.

I sat across the table from him. The first words that came out of his mouth were, "Are you saving your fucking money blondie?" I had to laugh. I could see that his vocabulary hadn't changed. I asked a lot of questions about his whereabouts for the last five years. The Vince that I once knew would have been blissfully boasting about his latest successful endeavors including a detailed list of all the extravagant things that he had purchased for himself. But the man that was sitting

across from me now did no such thing. Vince spoke slowly and very matter of factly about what had been going on in this life. He told me that he was virtually poverty stricken and had been living off the good graces of some older women that he recently met. The man that used to be clad in the finest of clothes and jewelry pointed to the cheap Timex watch on his wrist. His jewelry wasn't the only thing that was gone. Vince walked me out to the parking lot and showed me his new car. It was a beat up ten-year old Chevrolet. A far cry from the expensive Cadillacs and Elderados that he used to drive.

He admitted that he had become impoverished via his own greed and some type of business deals that had gone bad. Vince claimed that he had a gambling problem that had gotten out of control. He said that he had squandered a majority of his wealth on the blackjack tables in the glitzy casinos of Las Vegas.

Gambling wasn't Vince's only addiction. He also frequented whorehouses on a daily basis, enlisting the services of expensive prostitutes. Eventually, Vince Roth's extravagant spending habits caught up with him. By the age of 63, Vince had lost all of his money and was now financially destitute. Vince asked me if I knew where his ex-girlfriend, Sylvia, could be contacted. Years ago, Vince used to date one of the strippers that used to work for him at the Nite Strip Lounge. At one time, he lavished her with expensive gifts that consisted of expensive clothes, jewelry, and automobiles. He wined and dined her, taking her to pricey restaurants, and footing the bill for her $2,500 a month apartment. As time passed, Vince and Sylvia's relationship began to sour. Sylvia could no longer tolerate his explosive temper and foul mouth. Vince couldn't accept the fact that Sylvia had several other "sugar daddies" other than him. Their break up was less than amiable. She ended up leaving the state of Illinois and supposedly relocated to Atlanta, Georgia. They never saw each other again.

I told Vince that I had no idea where Sylvia was, and that I hadn't seen her in years. Vince said that he wanted to borrow some money from her. "The god damn bitch owes it to me," he stammered. "All that money I gave that good for nothing whore." I honestly didn't know where Sylvia was, but even if I did, I certainly wouldn't have told him. I wasn't oblivious to Vince Roth's faults, and I completely understood why Sylvia chose to end the relationship.

Vince's visit had a sobering effect on me. Although I wasn't superstitious, it seemed that some sort of tragedy or ill fate befell just about every person who worked at these clubs. I never laid eyes on Vince again. Several years later, I ran into his ex-girlfriend Sylvia at a Marshall Fields store. She had just moved back to Chicago as a result of her mother's illness. She casually mentioned that Vince Roth had recently died of a stroke. Sylvia told me that she had heard that he

died alone in a motel room. Apparently the woman that he had been living with prior to his death was kind enough to absorb the majority of the funeral costs. Another happy ending.

About four months after Vince Roth's visit, a majority of the Chicagoland areas crime ridden strip clubs were simultaneously raided one Saturday night by the FBI and IRS. I didn't go into work that night because I wanted to go out with my friends. At 10:00 p.m. or perhaps a bit later, my friends and I so happened to drive past the Nite Strip Lounge on the way to a bar. As we drove past the club, we noticed that the entire parking lot of the club was full of squad cars and paddy wagons. The first thing that crossed my mind was that there had probably been some type of a fight between management and some unhappy customers. I just kept driving and never gave it another thought.

One hour later, my friends and I arrived at the small bar that was known for its blue's singers. It was called "Blue Orleans." The nightclub wasn't especially busy.

It was still early and the entertainment had not yet begun. We decided to go sit at a table that was situated directly in front of the small stage. As we walked past the bar toward the stage, I noticed the bartender and a handful of people watching the late night news. One of my friends decided to stop at the bar to get a drink. I walked over to the bar with her and so happened to glance up at the TV. The news was showing the live coverage of a large police raid that had just taken place at some nightclub. A news reporter was shown standing in front of the club that had just been raided. A familiar looking marquee with flashing red lights ominously loomed in the background. I realized that it was the marquee of a strip club that was located approximately sixty miles north of the club I was currently dancing at. As a matter of fact, I personally knew several of the dancers that worked there.

According to this anchorman, most of the Chicagoland area strip clubs were simultaneously raided that evening. The raid was a direct result of a four-year FBI sting operation known as "Operation Safe Bet." The reporter revealed the names of all the clubs that had been targeted, and the Nite Strip Lounge was one of them. The news absolutely devastated me. Nothing frightened me more than the thought of losing my financial security.

When I came home that night, there were several messages waiting for me on my answering machine from a couple of my co-workers who had been involved in the raid. I called back one of the women who had left me a message and she told me what had happened in detail. Around 8:00 p.m., one hour after the club had opened, the room quickly began to fill up with customers. Nobody

gave it a second thought because it was pretty much the norm for a Saturday night. The dancers were making their usual rounds to the customers trying to get them to go into the secluded areas. Some of the customers responded to the solicitations, while others didn't.

At approximately 10:00 p.m., the music abruptly stopped and the interior lights of the club went on. Everyone was told to freeze. Paired up FBI and IRS agents whisked all the dancers and employees into separate corners of the room. The employees were interrogated and made to provide sufficient identification. The dancers who had the misfortune of going into the secluded area with one of the undercover agents were arrested.

This investigation led to the indictment and imprisonment of quite a few people who owned and operated some of the Chicagoland area's most infamous strip clubs. This raid marked the beginning of the end for most of these places. After the raid, practically everyone who was involved was subpoenaed to testify in front of the federal grand jury.

The raided clubs lost their ability to accept credit cards from reputable companies due to the fact that these clubs were under investigation for credit card fraud.

This meant that the clubs were forced to operate solely on a cash basis. Most customers didn't come monetarily prepared as far as their cash funds were concerned. Sales began to diminish causing the dancers revenue to decline substantially for the next couple of years.

My employment at the Nite Strip Lounge ended rather unexpectedly. It was a Friday night. I was about fifteen minutes late getting to work due to the traffic.

When I pulled into the parking lot of the club, I noticed that it was primarily empty which was highly unusual for a weekend night. I parked my car in a hand-icapped zone, and grabbed my makeup case. As I got close the entranceway of the club, I noticed that there was some kind of a sign posted on the front door. I walked up to the door to read what it said. The sign turned out to be a court order stating that the club was no longer open for business. I ignored the sign and attempted to open the large wooden door, but it was locked. A few seconds later, one of the doormen unlocked the front door and told me to go home because the IRS had permanently closed down the club. I couldn't believe it. I sat in my car for a good fifteen minutes trying to absorb what I had just heard. I felt like the rug had just been pulled out from underneath my feet. I couldn't understand how a business could dissolve so quickly and without any notice. Realizing that the situation was out of my control, I put my car in reverse and drove out of the parking lot.

6. Golden Show Lounge

"Sitting down by my window baby,
just looking out at the rain,
something grabbed a hold of me honey,
and it felt just like a ball and a chain."

Ball and Chain,
Willie Mae Thorton

One of the few redeeming qualities about being an exotic dancer was that if you were suddenly to lose your job (and suddenly was usually the case); you could start working at another club the very same day. The fact that we could become instantly employed provided the dancers with some semblance of job security.

It was now the late 1980's and there were few strip clubs left in the Chicagoland area. Most of these clubs permitted prostitution even though a lot of their competitors had been closed down as a result of Operation Safe Bet. The pickings were slim.

I had two choices. One of them was a club in a western suburb of Chicago. This was too far away. The other club was only thirty-five miles from where I lived, so I decided to work there. The name of this club was the Golden Show Lounge. At the time, it seemed the lesser of two evils. I made a quick phone call to the club before I went down there to make sure that they were hiring. Determined to be re-employed by 9:00 p.m., I began my journey to the Golden Show Lounge. The unexpected loss of employment coupled with the fact that I was about to go to work at a place that I didn't want to work at overwhelmed me. I experienced a frightening panic attack in route to the club. The attack was so severe that I was unable to drive. Gasping for a breath, I pulled into the parking lot of a retail store. I threw my car in park, and waited for the symptoms to subside. It felt like an elephant was sitting on my chest, and I couldn't breathe. I began to panic. The more I panicked the worst the symptoms became. I was convinced I was having a heart attack. Suddenly my head felt like it was spinning, and I lost touch with what was going on around me. Twenty minutes later I regained my composure and continued to drive.

When I arrived at the Golden Show Lounge, I wasn't surprised to

see that its appearance was just as depressing as the other clubs that I had worked at. The building itself was probably very attractive in its day; but time had taken a toll on it. The parking lot was in the back of the club and was devoid of any lighting. I parked my car and sat for a good fifteen minutes. The parking lot was so dark and desolate that I was actually afraid to get out of the car. The longer I sat in the car the more I had second thoughts about working at this club.

I couldn't understand why I kept subjecting myself to these deplorable places. I constantly felt guilty about the type of work that I did. Although I didn't consider myself to be a highly religious person, I did believe in God. I thought about Him every time that I walked through the doors of a strip club. I was thoroughly convinced that it was only a matter of time before God would pay me back for all my wrong doings, and that weighed heavily on my mind.

I thought about other options. Gainful employment was one of them, but the types of jobs that I was qualified for were low paying. This was my excuse for remaining in the strip clubs.

With great trepidation, I got out of my car and walked into the Golden Show Lounge, I was greeted by the all too familiar glow of dimly lit red lights. The inside of the club was dark and morbid looking. A huge ornate Victorian style fixture that looked like it belonged in a 1920's funeral parlor hung from the cracked ceiling in the large foyer. To my left was a doorway covered by black velvet drapes, which were tied back to one side by a tattered looking black tassel cord.

The black velvet drapes delivered a sobering effect that would have made the perfect backdrop for a coffin. Through the black fabric, I was able to see the legs of a man perched on a stool. My guess was that it was the doorman. When I walked through the draped entranceway, my suspicions were confirmed. A bald-headed Telly Savalas type, who had the personality of a broom and a physique of a marine drill sergeant, abruptly halted me. I have to admit that his appearance was intimidating and certainly appropriate for this position. I told the doorman that I had come to inquire about a job. "Hold on," the man said. His voice was gruff and unpleasant. I watched him dial a number from the black desk phone next to his perch. "There's a dancer here to see you," he said to the person on the other end of the phone. The stocky man slammed the receiver down on the base and told me that the manager was on his way. While waiting for the manager, I watched the doorman collect a fifteen-dollar cover charge from a great number of well-dressed men. They appeared to be polished white-collar businessmen. This was a definite improvement over the caliber of men that frequented other clubs.

Fifteen minutes went by, and the manager had still not appeared.

Finally, a gentleman in his mid-sixties popped his head around the corner and motioned for me to follow him. I followed the man into a huge showroom that smelled like an antique parlor.

In the middle of the room was a fairly small square shaped stage that was practically devoid of any lighting. A partially nude woman lazily strutted around the stage. Her sapphire, blue-sequined g-string glittered seductively beyond the ghostly veils of cigarette smoke. The older gentleman led me toward the service bar and invited me to sit down on one of the tall creaky bar stools. He sat down next to me. On the bar to my left were a coffee machine, cups, and a black desk phone. The man introduced himself to me as Mr. C. and told me that he was the manager in charge. He asked if I would like a cup of coffee. I nodded my head yes.

"You got it," he said with a smile that looked like more of a sneer. This man reminded me of someone, but I just couldn't figure out whom. Once my eyes had acclimated to the dark, I realized he was a dead ringer for the actor Jack Nicholson. Even his voice was similar, soft-spoken and somewhat sarcastic. Mr. C. slowly poured me a cup of coffee, and then poured one for himself. He pulled his barstool a few inches closer to mine and lit up a cigarette.

"What's your name," he inquired as he deliberately eyed me up and down. I told him my stage name. "Tell me where you worked before," he said while his eyes intensely scanned my body. I gave him a quick summary of the places I had worked. Mr. C. nodded his head as I spoke while he shifted his tie.

"You've got a lot of experience behind you," he remarked, "I like that. When were you thinking of starting?"

I told him that I would like to start immediately.

"Great," he said, "we're certainly glad to have you. You're a beautiful woman. There is no doubt about it." Mr. C. proceeded to tell me the rules of the club, which were generally the same as all the other clubs. When my interview was over, I told Mr. C. that I had to go out to my car to get my costumes. As I stood up from the barstool, he gently grabbed my arm. "I'm sure that I don't have to tell you this because you're an old pro, but just in case, there's no prostitution allowed here." I assured him that he didn't have a thing to worry about.

Every strip club manager that I had ever interviewed with gave me the same old spiel about prostitution. They all claimed, "no acts of prostitution would be tolerated outside of the club." Ironically, they didn't seem to mind if certain sexual activities such as oral sex or intercourse took place within the club, as long as the club owners could gain from it.

After working at the Golden Show Lounge for several days, it

became apparent that most of the clients were white-collar businessmen. The management strictly enforced a dress code. They referred to the code as the “suit and tie policy.”

Unkempt, skuzzy looking men or blue-collar workers were firmly turned away at the door. Customers had to show the doorman both a valid driver’s license and a major credit card. Those who couldn’t produce the required identification weren’t allowed in. This process was intended to keep out problematic patrons and or under cover police agents.

The Golden Show Lounge didn’t cater to a large number of customers. There were usually about ten men in the audience at one time. Most of them opted to take a dancer into the secluded area. Unlike the other clubs where I’d worked, this club kept quite a few steady customers. Management rolled out the red carpet for men who spent well into the thousands.

Mr. C. made it a point to superficially befriend these customers. When they came into the club, he would sit at the bar with them and strike up a conversation.

Later, the customer would disappear into the darkness with one of the dancers.

Not all the customers were treated like royalty. The ones who didn’t cooperate with the management were physically battered. Mr. C. was the master of ceremonies when it came to negative reinforcements.

Mr. C. for reasons unknown never chose to marry. He lived alone in a small house situated on six acres of land. The pinnacle of his bleak existence was to flirt with the dancers, who basically wanted nothing to do with him. His other hobby was raising ferrets and these animals were sadly enough, the apples of his eye.

Mr. C. was kind of a sadistic individual. When business was slow, he enjoyed entertaining the troops with some of his old “war” stories. Most were detailed descriptions of him physically beating rebellious customers that refused to pay their tabs. His eyes would practically light up when he spoke of this. Although his stories were always of a violent nature, they were quite comical. Mr. C. also told us about the high-profile clientele that had frequented the club over the years. He gave us the entire low down on their sexual practices, the amount of money they spent, and the name of the dancer that they spent it on.

One of the men that he told us about was a highly respected religious figure who often appeared on television. This customer would come into the club seeking perverse sexual activities.

The Golden Show Lounge operated differently than most of the other strip clubs in that they kept detailed files on their customers. These files contained names, addresses, work and home phone

numbers, driver's license numbers, the name of the dancer they spent money on, and the amount of money they spent. They even kept a detailed description of the customer's sexual appetites. These records were locked up in a large metal file cabinet for management's eyes only.

Not only was this club unique in the sense that they kept such close tabs on their patrons; they also had a fairly unorthodox way of conducting business. In every strip club I had ever worked at, the waitress collected the money from the customer before they were allowed to go into the secluded area with the dancer. This system was designed to ensure payment; otherwise most of the men probably wouldn't have paid. Especially the men who were with women, like me, that didn't engage in any sexual activities with the customers.

The management at the Golden Show Lounge allowed the customers to run tabs.

This meant that the customers weren't required to pay for the dancers company until the end of the party. Customers were required to spend about $380 every ten minutes in order to retain the companionship of the dancer. At the end of these ten-minute intervals, the waitress would interrupt the dancer and her customer so that she could solicit the man to spend more money. If the man consented, an additional $380 was put on his tab. If the customer refused to spend anymore, he was presented with his original bill of $380 and a hefty service charge.

The spending game went on for as long as we were able to coerce the customer into spending his money. Our job was to keep them "amused and confused."

Some of the customers would refuse to pay their bills simply because they were trying to get one over on the management. Others played stupid, claiming that they weren't told that the bill was cumulative. The first time that I had encountered this problem was with Matt, a fat middle-age businessman. He claimed that he had just come from visiting his terminally ill wife in the nearby hospital. He said he was bored with his wife, and sick of having to deal with her illness. Matt felt that his wife's illness was putting a damper on his sex life. "I need to look at something healthy and new, not some sick old bitch on her last leg," the chunky man muttered as he sloppily slid a large ice cube from his glass of coke into his small, rubbery-looking mouth. The waitress, a tacky looking transvestite, fluttered over to the table where Matt and I sat, and delivered the secluded-area pitch to the ugly, misshapen man. He was more than happy to comply and frantically reached for his wallet. The waitress refused the man's money and explained to him that we would be running a tab. "Play now and pay later," she said to Matt as she patted him on the

shoulder. The customer smiled.

I led my eager victim over to one of the long purple velvet couches that were located in the far corner of the room. The minute the man sat down on the couch he began to unzip his pants. I decided I should bring another dancer into the party, because these types of men were easier to control with two women. The double diversion made it easier for us to stall the man until the waitress came back. I ordered him to zip up his pants. At first he refused to cooperate, so I told him that if he didn't do what I said, he wouldn't get his special surprise. The gullible man fell for it, and quickly zipped up his pants. His behavior reminded me of a famished dog waiting for a bone. "What's the surprise?" the desperate man asked me. His voice was quivering. "I have to go get the surprise," I replied. The man attempted to get off the couch, and I pushed him back down. I told him to wait for me while I fetched his surprise. The chubby man reluctantly sat back down clutching his crotch. I quickly made my way over to the bar where I found my waitress and Mr. C. engrossed in conversation. I told the waitress that I needed another dancer on the party as soon as possible. The waitress excused herself from Mr. C.'s company and headed toward the dancer's dressing room.

Within minutes the waitress returned with a buxom brunette. Collectively the three of us plowed through the darkness toward the back of the room where the customer sat waiting for his surprise. I took my sexy co-worker by the hand and positioned her directly in front of the man. "Here is your surprise honey," I said,

"her name is Diva. How do you like her?" I asked. "Not bad," the man replied.

He immediately reached for her crotch. The dancer quickly pushed his hand away. Hold on a minute, you have to spend some money on me first. "I am not going to spend any more money in this place!" he yelled. "I can go to any god damn massage parlor and get whatever I want for $200!" the man insisted. Diva and I didn't respond to the man's outburst. "This place is a rip-off! If you think I am paying that $380, you have another thing coming!" he screamed. The man refused to pay his bill and demanded to talk to the manager.

The waitress, who had quite a bit of experience in handling furious customers, calmly instructed the man to follow her to the front bar. The tall gawky looking waitress guided the man through the darkness of the room with the bright yellow beam of her flashlight. When the customer approached the area of the bar where Mr. C. was sitting, I saw the waitress go over to him and whisper something in his ear. Mr. C. gave her a quick nod of acknowledgement while taking a long exaggerated sip of his coffee. Before I knew it, my customer walked over to where Mr. C. was sitting and pointed his short-stubby

finger directly into his face. I couldn't hear the conversation between the two men because the music was so loud. I did notice that Mr. C. had gotten up off his barstool and was now towering over the short-dumpy man.

The men's voices began to escalate. I heard Mr. C. say, "We'll see about that," as he firmly grabbed the customer by the back of his neck and literally slammed him down on the seat of the barstool. The short man tried to resist and attempted to lunge at Mr. C. This time Mr. C. slammed him full force into the wall. I heard the customer shriek as his wide-round head met full force with the hard structure of the wall.

A few minutes later, both doormen ran into the bar area to assist Mr. C. They ripped the black wool overcoat off the man's body. "Put the fucking slob on his stomach," Mr. C. ordered. He then savagely searched the back pockets of the fat man's baggy trousers and pulled out his wallet. The customer began to threaten Mr. C. with calling the police, but Mr. C. just laughed and threw the man's wallet onto the bar. The two doormen pulled the bloody, disheveled man off the floor and slammed him back down onto the seat of the barstool. The customer began to scream something about a lawsuit. Mr. C. hauled off and backhanded the man across the face. "Now are you going to pay your bill or do I have to call your wife and explain the problem to her?" Mr. C. instructed the bartender to strip the man's wallet of any cash, credit cards, and forms of identification.

"What are you doing?" the customer screamed as he watched the bartender tear his wallet apart. "Shut up!" Mr. C. said to the pathetic man. The bartender found about $900 in cash along with a golden American Express credit card. Mr. C.

grabbed the credit card out of the bartender's hand and shoved it into the fat man's perspiring face. "Be prepared to sign your worthless life away you sick son of a bitch." Mr. C. threw the credit card up onto the bar and ordered the bartender to "run it up."

"Put it through for $4,000, our little friend will sign it."

The customer who by this time had no more fight left in him, agreed to sign the voucher. When Mr. C. gave his empty wallet back to him, he sheepishly slid it back inside of his jacket pocket while grabbing his black wool coat off the floor.

As he started to stagger toward the direction of the foyer, Mr. C. gave him one last shove. "It could have been a lot cheaper if you would have done it our fucking way; now get the fuck out of here!" Throughout this whole incident, some of the other dancers and I stood on the other side of the bar watching the show. The only thing missing was the popcorn.

As time passed, it had become obvious to me that this type of violent confrontation between management and the customers was a

common occurrence. On weeknights, these scenes occurred two to three times a night, and on the weekends there were more. The routine was always the same; however, the intensity of the beatings would vary depending on the nature of the crime.

It was common knowledge that Mr. C. and his hired hands would make weekly visits to customers that had become indebted to the club. These men had refused to pay their debit or just spent beyond their means. Whatever the case, Friday mornings were collection time and Mr. C. and his proteges would routinely visit the customer at their workplace in order to collect monies due. If the customer didn't make their payments, Mr. C. would threaten to inform their employer and call or visit their wives. Many of the customers owed the club thousands of dollars. Some of these men had been making payments on their bills for several years.

The dancers whose customers were making weekly payments to the club weren't paid their commissions until the bill was paid in full. In most cases, by the time the customer finally satisfied his debt the dancer was long gone. Sixty-percent of the time, managers recovered their monies with some form of black mail. The other forty-percent was a loss and unfortunately the ones who suffered were the dancers. In spite of what everyone thought, especially the dancer's family or friends, we worked extremely hard for the money that we made. Most people wanted to believe that all we did was party for eight hours a night and walk away with a ton of money. Nothing could have been further from the truth. Most of the time, we worked in less than humane conditions. Our employers were nothing more than glorified pimps incapable of making a living any other way. It was a rough and dangerous business to be in.

The things that went on at the Golden Show Lounge reminded me of some of the incidents portrayed in the old Hollywood mobster movies. It wasn't uncommon for me to stand on the sidelines all decked out in a $2,000 gown watching some customer's head get bashed open. What would seem utterly incomprehensible to the average person was nothing more than "business as usual" for the dancers.

One of the most memorable evenings took place on a very hot and humid Friday night in the latter part of July. By 11:30 p.m., there had been four violent altercations between management and customers who refused to pay their bills. Mr. C.

didn't appear to be in an especially good mood. Instead of laughing and joking with the employees, he sat alone at the edge of the bar holding his head in his hands. Most of the time Mr. C. thoroughly enjoyed the confrontations, but that night he seemed agitated by it all.

Business wasn't particularly good. I had already danced three times and had only made forty-five dollars. Feeling drained, I decided to go downstairs to the dressing room for a while. As I walked through the crowd, one of the men who I had spoken to earlier in the evening flagged me down. I seductively walked over to the man's table and managed to put on a big smile. The dark-haired man looked me up and down.

"I'm ready for you now," he said, "call the waitress."

I quickly summoned the waitress, and to make a long story short, the customer ran up a tab of nearly $2,400. This individual was extremely grabby and demanding. I had to do a lot of talking to keep him under control. When the waitress presented the man with his final bill of $2,400 plus a 15% service charge, he blew up. The waitress didn't argue with the man. Instead she very calmly instructed him to follow her to the bar. After the waitress left the customer with Mr. M., I walked over to the other side of the bar and waited for the show to begin. In the reflection of the mirror I could see the disgruntled customer and Mr. C. standing face to face, engaged in a heated discussion. Suddenly, I saw Mr. C. bash the man in the face with the black desk phone that was sitting at the end of the bar. The man lost his balance from the unexpected blow and fell backwards into a large, plastic-potted plant. The left side of the man's face was bleeding profusely. He struggled to get up from the floor while covering the injury with his hand in an attempt to stop the bleeding. Amazingly enough he managed to stagger back over to where Mr. C. was standing.

"You know what, you god damned prick, I've got all the money, but if you really want it buddy, you're going to have to go up my ass to get it!" he exclaimed.

Mr. C. just smiled at the pathetic man's revelation. "Is that so? Well, I guess we're just going to have to take you up on your offer, now aren't we?"

Mr. C. swiftly kicked the man in the stomach. The bartender who had been watching the two men argue came out from behind the bar to assist Mr. C. They dragged the screaming customer into the men's room and proceeded to beat him some more.

A few moments later, the waitress walked over to where I was standing to ask me what was going on. I told her that the bartender and Mr. C. had just escorted the man into the men's room to retrieve the money that he owed on his bill. The waitress began to laugh. "Well," she said, "a beating a day keeps our bills away." I found her comment to be quite comical. After all, there certainly was some truth to it.

About ten minutes later, the bartender and Mr. C. emerged from

the men's bathroom dragging the customer toward the back exit. Mr. C. pushed the badly beaten man out into the parking lot, slammed the back door closed, and locked it. The bartender resumed his position behind the bar. A few minutes later, Mr. C. removed his sports coat. I noticed that his white short sleeve shirt was drenched in sweat. He wiped his forehead off with a bar towel, lit up a cigarette, and sat down on his favorite barstool as if nothing had happened.

Later on that evening, I decided to ask my boss about the incident that transpired a few hours earlier. Mr. C. smiled sadistically and gave me a blow-by-blow account of what went on in the men's bathroom with my customer. "Don't worry; you'll get paid on this one. The crazy son of a bitch had the money shoved up his ass in a plastic baggy." Mr. C. commented while taking a drag off of his cigarette. "What happened to the guy after you threw him out into the parking lot?" I inquired. "Who the hell knows? If he's smart, he'll start walking to a hospital," Mr. C. replied. "He didn't look like he was in walking condition to me," I remarked. Mr. C. laughed. "I'll go outside and check on the dope later. Order me a large cheese pizza from Amagetti's," he casually said to the bartender. Mr. C.

reached over to one of the newspapers that he always kept at the bar. "Got to check the obituaries," he dismissively said. "No telling when one of our customers might end up there." I'm sure you'll see to it that some of them do," I commented. Mr. C. snickered, "just think, someday when I'm too old to do this, I can work for a collection agency." He poured himself a cup of coffee, and I just walked away.

It was my turn to dance on the stage. I had a lot on my mind this particular evening. The last thing that I wanted to do was to entertain a bunch of lecherous men. Working at the Golden Show Lounge had become counter productive for me. I couldn't make any money at this club, because of management's "play now" and "pay later" policy. The beatings that the men received when they refused to pay their bills didn't compensate me for the money I lost. By the time I finished my set, I made the decision to leave the Golden Show Lounge. I just didn't know what hellhole I was going to work at next.

About a week after I made the decision to leave the club, a friend of mine called me about a strip club that had just reopened. The name of the club was the Vegas Star. Apparently, this club had been closed down for several years as a result of prostitution charges, and had reopened under new management. The friend that gave me the information about the club claimed that there was no mandated prostitution, and referred to the club as a "virtual gold mine." That's all I needed to hear. I told my friend that I was definitely interested. The next night, I stopped by the Vegas Star on my way to work at the Golden Show Lounge. I was hired immediately.

I wanted to finish out the week at the Golden Show Lounge. Payday at the club was on Saturday night. This meant that if I had any hopes of retrieving my paycheck, I would have to finish out the week here. I ended up calling in sick on Monday through Friday. I was tired of working at the club and I needed to take some time off. I didn't go back to work at the Golden Show Lounge until Saturday night. We rarely received our paychecks before 2:30 in the morning. Management had deliberately set it up this way to discourage the dancers from grabbing their money and leaving work early. I didn't care if I made any money that evening. It was my last night of work at this place, and I just wanted to get it over with. Instead of soliciting customers, I elected to spend the first half of the shift in the dressing room reading magazines and conversing with a few of the other dancers.

The conversations in the dancer's dressing rooms were usually quite entertaining.

Somebody always had a new bizarre story to tell. The topics of discussion varied.

Sex, drugs, customers, lovers, plastic surgery, and the dancer's personal problems (which were endless) were some of the topics. This particular evening the discussion revolved around two dancers that had just recently started to work at the Golden Show Lounge. Just a few weeks ago, Amber and Silver decided to leave the state of Florida with the intention of seeking employment at one of the strip clubs around the Chicagoland area. The two women worked together at several of the Orlando and Daytona Beach area strip clubs from 1986 to 1989. It was now 1990. The two attractive dancers decided to try their luck in Illinois after befriending a couple of strippers who resided in Chicago. The well-seasoned dancers from Florida were both very friendly and outgoing. It wasn't long before they began telling their newfound friends at the Golden Show Lounge stories about the clubs that they had worked at in Orlando.

There seemed to be an unspoken bond between exotic dancers, regardless of what part of the country you were from. Although we differed from each other as far as our personal history and life style, we seemed to share the same attitudes as far as our outlook on life, strip clubs, and customers were concerned. That attitude was negative. I met very few women that actually liked their profession, or men for that matter, especially the customers. Some of the dancers hated the customers more than others, and they made no bones about showing their feelings. Amber and Silver became engaged in a conversation with an older dancer by the name of Dahlia. Dahlia was telling the two Floridians that she always kept a loaded gun under the front seat of her car for protection, because a customer was stalking

her.

"If I wasn't so afraid of going to prison, I could easily go on a killing spree. I hate these customers and would have no problem disposing of a few of them," Dahlia stated.

Silver laughed at her comment and said, "You remind me of this chick that we met down in the Daytona Beach area. The police have been looking for her ever since the corpse of a frequent customer was discovered."

"Do you think she killed him?" Dahlia asked.

"She could have, who knows? Let's put it this way, I wouldn't put it past any of the dancers that I have met. You never really know anybody that works at these clubs," Silver commented. I agreed with her. There was an air of anonymity about exotic dancers that you could never quite put your finger on. A year later, a prostitute was arrested in central Florida for the murders of seven men. As the story unraveled, the person Silver spoke of a year earlier turned out to be the infamous serial killer, Aileen Wuornos. Years later the motion picture "Monster" was released that was based on her tragic life story.

I stayed in the dressing room and chatted with my co-workers for several hours.

Somewhere around midnight the club began to get fairly busy. None of the dancers were out on the floor because they were busy smoking dope in the women's restroom. Mr. C. stormed into the dressing room and told us that if we didn't come out onto the floor, none of us would be paid at the end of the night. Needless to say, we all left the dressing room in a hurry. As I walked out from the dressing room toward the showroom, I noticed suit clad men carrying briefcases walking through the club. The mysterious looking men immediately went downstairs to the owner's office. They disappeared for a while and then left the club.

This type of activity went on at the club just about every night of the week.

Rumor had it that this club served a host for illegal gambling rings and other mob related activities.

Before I reached the main room, I was stopped by one of the waitresses. She asked me if I was busy. I wasn't thinking, so I made the mistake of telling her that I wasn't. Before I knew it, I was being whisked away into the secluded area. "You won't be alone with this guy," the waitress said, "he already has four other dancers back there with him, and has put close to $6,000 on his tab." I was relieved to learn that this wasn't going to be another grueling one-on-one situation. As soon as I got back to where the customer was sitting, all four dancers greeted me.

"Look at what we found, Sathen!" a couple of the women began

to laugh, “Turn the flashlight on so that Sathen can see little Markie.” Little Markie turned out to be an elderly man laying on the floor in a fetal position. The man was clad in a pair of diapers that were fastened on to his body with what appeared to be a couple of clothespins. “What the hell is that?” I said to one of the dancers. “This is our new little baby,” one of the girls replied. While nudging my arm she said,

“Isn’t he sweet?”

“He’s lovely,” I remarked, “what rock did you guys find him under?” The dancer who was shining the flashlight on the customer told me to be quiet. “Don’t talk so loud, you’ll wake up baby.” I looked down at the pathetic excuse of a man huddled up on a make shift blanket that one of dancers had constructed out of some dirty old bar towels.

The man began to whimper. “I think the baby wants his bottle,” one of the dancers suggested. “No!” one of the other dancers protested. “He needs his diapers changed. Who wants to change baby?” Nobody offered. A couple of minutes later the sitcom was interrupted by the waitress. “How about another round for the girls?” the waitress asked the diaper-clad man. The character of little Markie suddenly disappeared and had been replaced with a very angry perverse old man.

The man reached for his pack of cigarettes that were lying on a nearby table. “I’m done spending,” the man replied, “I’ve already agreed to spend $6,000 and I haven’t even so much as begun to get my money’s worth.”

The customer grabbed his trousers that were thrown underneath the couch. “I’m out of here,” the man said, while struggling to pull up his pants. The waitress tried to talk him into staying, but it was to no avail. Without warning, the man bolted and began to run toward the front door of the club without paying his bill.

The waitress ran after him while screaming for the aid of a doorman. A few minutes later the fleeing customer was apprehended. To make a long story short, the doorman cracked the man’s head open with a small black, lead-filled club that he kept concealed in his suit jacket. He also bashed out the windshields of the customer’s vehicle.

I was relieved when Saturday night finally ended. My sentence at the Golden Show Lounge was about to come to an end, and although it wasn’t a particularly lucrative experience for me, it certainly was a memorable one.

Once I received my paycheck, I gave my resignation to Mr. C. He was surprised by the news and asked me why I was leaving. I told him that the club’s system didn’t work for me. Mr. C. took a long exaggerated drag off his cigarette and deliberately exhaled the stale-

smelling smoke directly into my face. “I’m sorry to hear that Sathen, but our system works for us.”

“That’s right,” I replied in a hostile tone, “and that’s exactly why I’m leaving!”

“Suit yourself,” Mr. C. sarcastically remarked. “I intend to,” I curtly replied as I walked out the door. The Golden Show Lounge was now behind me.

I really wasn’t the type of person who enjoys changing jobs frequently. I preferred to stay in one place for a fairly long time, but working at the Golden Show Lounge had become counter productive for me.

I was approaching the age of 34, and I was still not ready to leave the strip clubs.

For some reason, I kept avoiding mainstream society. I could never quite figure myself out. I certainly wasn’t criminally inclined, yet I continued to work in an environment that condoned crime.

Besides the fact that I was totally miserable with the profession that I had chosen, I was equally as displeased with my personal life. Over the years, I had developed a few close friendships, but the people that I gravitated toward were as mixed up as I was, if not more. Most of them were alcoholics, drug users, or emotionally unstable. Because I had an intense fear of ending up alone, I drifted from relationship to relationship and moved from place to place. I kept looking for something that didn’t exist. When I became burned out on relationships, I opted to live with roommates. Finding a reliable person to share a home or apartment with wasn’t an easy task. Nothing ever seemed to work out for me, and I could never understand why.

For years I had very little interest in anyone or anything. My sole existence revolved around looking at myself in the mirror. My free time was spent cruising the cosmetic counters in search of the ultimate product that I thought would further enhance my beauty. If I weren’t doing that, I would lock myself in the house and spend hours listening to my favorite type of music, the “blues.”

I didn’t have much of a personal life. Working nights in the strip club for twenty something years did nothing to enhance a person’s social life. Therefore, it’s easy to become socially disconnected while working in this type of business. Exotic dancers aren’t considered to be of any particular value to society. We’re often thought of as social misfits or deviant criminals. Subsequently, you become secretive about your life. If you don’t, you discover that you’re setting yourself up to be discriminated against by landlords, financial institutions, and prospective employers.

Our profession also had a negative impact on our personal

relationships both platonic and romantic. Many of the dancers never told their parents or children the truth about where they worked, because we didn't want to hurt our families.

There were very few people that we could be honest with.

People who became romantically involved with exotic dancers were more often than not left disenchanted. Initially, a majority of our spouses, lovers, or significant others were drawn to our physical appearance. They were intrigued with what we did for a living, and impressed with the amount of money we made. But after awhile, our mates began to resent us for various reasons. A lot of them were covertly jealous of the income that we generated. Others became over possessive, and would accuse us of being a prostitute when things didn't go the way they expected in the relationship. It was for this reason that a majority of the dancers that I knew, myself included, were unable to connect with a permanent mate.

Our personal relationships usually became highly combative as soon as the novelty of dating a stripper wore off.

We worked in a very dangerous environment primarily staffed and operated by treacherous sociopath personalities. Strip clubs typically didn't attract the most scrupulous of people. The worst offenders were usually the club owners who thrived on the unfortunate plights of the women who worked for them. I learned fairly early on that you could trust very few people in this business. If you were smart, you didn't get involved with anyone you worked with.

Over the course of the years, I have met and worked with several hundred dancers, but there were only a handful of them that I actually befriended. Outside of an isolated few, I paid very little attention to the rest. I was so absorbed in my own misery that it was virtually impossible to get to know all the tormented souls that surrounded me. Many of these women suffered from serious psychiatric disorders. The most common being schizophrenia, bipolar, borderline personality disorder, or a combination of the above. They were so dysfunctional that it would've been impossible for them to secure any type of employment outside of the sex industry. Unfortunately, the greedy club owners weren't oblivious to this fact.

7. The Vegas Star
XXX Rated Nude Show Girls

The club Vegas Star defied all description. Located approximately fifty miles outside of the Chicago city limits, the Vegas Star was ironically sandwiched between a dismal looking cemetery and a Christian Bible Church. The exterior of the building was old and run down. Huge and unruly looking trees loomed around the perimeter of the club. This was the type of setting one might see in a horror movie. You would think that this club's seedy appearance would be a deterrent to even the most perverse individuals, but it wasn't. The parking lot was always packed full of automobiles, and expensive ones at that. The interior of this club was tacky and outdated. It reminded me of a cheap carnival. A small popcorn machine stood in a dark corner of the front foyer. These snacks were intended for the customers. A bag of stale popcorn could be purchased for seventy-five cents.

I would like to begin the story of this ten-year nightmare with the fine people that owned and operated the Vegas Star. I shall start with a man by the name of Adrian, who was believed to be one of several owners of the Vegas Star. Adrian was a classless, arrogant man in his early seventies, who was violent and showed no sympathy for any living thing. Charles Manson had nothing on this guy.

Adrian's appearance was equally as repugnant as his personality. He was approximately five feet six inches tall on a good day, and was overweight by at least 120 pounds. The skin on his face was pasty white and excessively wrinkled for a man of his age. Adrian's facial features were similar to that of a bulldog, but not quite that attractive. His posture was absolutely deplorable. The dancers nicknamed him "Hunch," like the Hunchback of Notre Dame.

Adrian always wore his hair slicked back with "Vitalis" or something equally greasy. His lack of personal hygiene was absolutely disgusting. He reeked of stale men's cologne and body odor. I always did my best to avoid any close contact with the man. Adrian was a walking contradiction. His clothes were disheveled and cheap, but his jewelry was gaudy and expensive. Adrian was obsessed with expensive automobiles. He was the proud owner of two brand new Jaguars, one Ferrari, and a candy-apple red Porsche. His favorite vehicle was a fully loaded, shiny black Lincoln Continental with custom leather upholstery. He used to refer to this one as his "hearse."

Beneath Adrian's disgusting physical presence was a vile personality, indicative of a sociopath. His sordid world revolved

around his illegally gained money and possessions. Adrian was a very wealthy man. Who, like all the other club owners that I had met, made a good living by exploiting women. Uneducated and severely lacking in social graces, this man was famous for urinating on the carpet in his office, because he was simply too lazy to get up and go to the bathroom.

There were also stories of human feces found in old coffee cans thrown in corners of the club by Adrian who used them as portable toilets. Sadly enough, I found the rumors to be highly believable. The dirty, run-down interior of the building made a believer out of me. I could never quite understand how the Vegas Star was able to escape the attention of the Illinois Board of Health.

When I first began working at the Vegas Star, Adrian was married to a woman by the name of Saydra. She was overweight, but very sultry looking raven-haired woman in her late forties. Adrian and Saydra connected years ago at a downtown Chicago strip club where she worked. At one time, Adrian had been one of Saydra's most lucrative repeat customers. Mesmerized by her exotic beauty, Adrian fell for her hook, line, and sinker. Before long, this calculating woman had him eating out of her hands.

Over time, Saydra supposedly coerced him into assisting her in illegal abortions.

These abortions were supposedly performed in the back seats of cars. There were rumors that Saydra's and Adrian's black market business was at one time extremely lucrative. Proceeds enabled the couple to become involved in an even more lucrative venture, strip tease clubs. Although this couple's history had never actually been confirmed, I certainly wouldn't have put it past either one of them.

Adrian and Saydra weren't the only unscrupulous people connected with the Vegas Star lounge. The waitresses, who were management's right arm, were equally as corrupt. There were three waitresses at the club. These women, whose ages ranged from 46–58 years old, mysteriously appeared at the Vegas Star professing to be ex-strippers from Las Vegas. Adrian was taken in by their attractive appearances and smooth talk.

The mysterious trio lived together in a very expensive home, located in an affluent nearby suburb. Unbeknownst to Adrian, these ladies were operating a very profitable side business extracting thousands of dollars from the customers that patronized the club through elaborate scams. The customers who were duped by this treacherous trio claimed they had been coerced into spending exorbitant amounts of money for sexual activities, which radically deviated from the norm.

Customers who desired to have sex with corpses, children, or

animals were the targets of these con artists. The waitresses enticed these men by claiming that they had connections with proprietors of funeral homes and child care facilities that were willing to cooperate for a price. There were also reports of customers being recruited into dangerous cults, disguised as sex parties. Once the men were drawn into these cult operations, they were blackmailed and threatened if they didn't cooperate.

Most of the men who fell prey to these scams were married and couldn't afford to take any legal recourse against the women. These waitresses had a host of shrewd attorneys at their beck and call. Some of the dancers got wind as to what was going on and attempted to alert Adrian. However, Adrian and his wife were in denial and simply wouldn't listen. As a matter of fact, any dancer that said anything negative about the waitresses was fired. Meanwhile, thousands of dollars escaped the hands of Adrian and his silent business partners. Instead, the money went into the pockets of the waitresses and dancers involved in the scam.

In the past, I had always worked in clubs that were very strict, or at least tried to operate with some semblance of order. In this particular club, there was virtually none, with the exception of the attendance policy. The dancers were required to show up for work on the days they were scheduled. If they called in sick, or didn't come in, they were fined $300, which had to be paid before they could return to work. Outside of mandated attendance, the dancers were free to do as they pleased as long as they made money for the house.

The amount of substance abuse that took place in this club was alarming. Both management and employees were chronically drunk and high. By the end of the evening, many of the dancers could be found passed out on the dirty floors of the dressing room, or collapsed over filthy toilet bowls in the restrooms. Nobody even bothered to revive them before the club closed. Subsequently, these women were left laying in filth until the club reopened the next night at 8:00 p.m.

Adrian and his unscrupulous management team did everything to encourage these women to continue their self-destructive behavior. Management exercised control over them by supporting their habit of choice. If the dancers were unable to fund their addictions, the owners would lend them the money until they got paid. Death came to several of these women. Windy, who was formally diagnosed bipolar, had spent most of her life frequenting mental institutions. She was prescribed Lithium, but claimed that she couldn't take it because it made her sick.

She came from a very dysfunctional family that was incapable of helping her.

Windy was alone in the world and very ill. She would frequently

talk about committing suicide. “I might as well kill myself,” the pretty young woman would say,

“I’ve got nothing in my life, no boyfriend, no husband, no life… nobody wants me. My only family is the people that work at the club,” she insisted. One day, Windy didn’t show up for work. Her landlord called the club and told the bartender that Windy was found dead in her apartment. Apparently, she drank down a bottle of battery acid. Her personal belongings consisted of nothing but a few stuffed animals, broken down furniture, and some costumes that she wore up on stage. The strand of black boa feathers that she once used to dance with, hung wearily over an old wire hanger in the dancer’s dressing room, untouched for several years. They were eventually used as a dog leash on one of the customers.

Windy, wasn’t the only tragic figure that walked through the doors of the Vegas Star lounge.

The story of Tabatha was equally as disturbing. One evening a truck driver walked through the front door of the club carrying an unconscious woman that he had found laying in the parking lot of the club. The stranger asked the doorman if the woman belonged to “us.” Ironically, Vegas Star didn’t employ the unidentified woman. The management team happened to have been standing nearby when the man carried in the woman. Adrian decided that he could use another dancer and instructed the truck driver to “throw the bitch in his office.” This is where she spent the night after being raped by Adrian and the two doormen. The next night, the poor woman was up on stage stark naked and stumbling around drunk. The audience and the management heckled and laughed while some of the customers threw cigarette butts at the woman’s crotch. A month later the woman was found dead in a nearby field, by an apparent self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head.

Tragedy, illness, and monumental personal problems touched the lives of just about every person who worked at this club. The morale was very low. We all hated our jobs, and we made damn sure that the customers knew it. As far as we were concerned, the customers could do no right. We hated the men who spent money on us and despised the ones who didn’t.

Our distain for the customers was certainly not unwarranted. Most of the men who patronized strip clubs had absolutely no regard for the dancers, and even less for their wives and children. Some of us went out of our way to pay the men back for their infidelities by humiliating them in various ways.

The antics we resorted to were rather humorous, or at least we thought they were.

I was the mastermind behind a few of them. Our prime targets

were the married men who solicited us for sex, yet claimed that they were happily married. We always made sure that these offenders left with some type of derogatory message on the back of their shirts or suit jackets written with bright-red lipstick. The messages varied, but most of the time we wrote something like “strip joint junkie,” or the word, “sucker.” Some of the dancers chose to scribble the name of the club across their backs for the entire world to see, especially their wives.

Men who chose to expose their sexual organs while we were on stage were another group of deserving candidates. Most of the time, we would dump a cup of scalding hot coffee on their laps or a glass of ice water in hopes of curtailing their masturbating.

A few of the more creative dancers would deliberately drop their lit cigarettes into their suit or coat pocket or snuff their cigarettes out on the men’s exposed penis.

Sometimes we would stick large wads of chewing gum in their hair or toupees without their knowledge.

Last but not least was a form of humiliation that we called the “squirt gun treatment.” We’d fill up plastic squirt guns with blue ink or hair bleach. Then, we very discreetly sprayed the backs of their heads or clothes with it. This was one of our favorite stunts and was primarily used on cheapskates. These were the men that would come into the club at 7:00 p.m. and stay until closing. Besides the fact they out-stayed their welcome, they were also non-spenders. These men absolutely infuriated us because as long as they remained in the club, we had to keep going up on stage to dance. It didn’t matter if there was one customer or one hundred. Most strip clubs advertised continuous nude dancing which meant that a dancer must be up on the stage at all times. When we were forced to dance for these types of men, some of us would rebel by playing obnoxious music or just standing on the stage fully clothed while drinking coffee or smoking cigarettes.

The more insightful customers took the hint and left.

There was nothing sweet or sexy going on in strip clubs, at least not the ones that I worked at. They were primarily battlefields. Where an ongoing war took place between the dancers and the customers. The men basically disliked us and we loathed them. Our ultimate goal was to turn their wildest fantasy into their worst nightmare and most of the time we succeeded.

This club was no different than the rest of the clubs in the sense that it too generated quite a lot of revenue. The thing that set it apart from all the others was that there was absolutely no intervention from management as far as what went on in the place. There was also no mandated prostitution, which gave the professional hustlers a free

reign to basically do whatever they pleased. The dancers and waitresses were able to charge the customers as much as they wanted to. There was no ceiling on prices. Nor did anyone monitor the time that we spent with the customers. We left them as quickly as we could once we got their money.

The clientele typically spent anywhere from $1,000 and up in less than an hour for not much more than a couple of flat cokes and some staged erotic conversation from the dancer or dancers of his choice. It wasn't uncommon for men to spend at much as $10,000, or even $20,000 for the company of a woman. Those who had never been exposed to this type of business would probably find these tales difficult to believe, but it happened time and time again.

Unlike the Golden Show Lounge, which enforced a dress code and catered to a more sophisticated crowd, this club didn't discriminate against blue-collar workers or undesirable individuals. As long as a man had a wallet with money in it, he was welcome. Every customer that walked through the doors was a potential mark.

The atmosphere of the club was highly combative due to the abundance of disgruntled customers. Although, this club operated under a casual style of management, there was one rule that was consistently enforced and that was the "no money back policy." Customers who challenged the policy were violently beaten.

The fistfights, head bashing, and pistol whipping that took place at the Golden Show Lounge paled in comparison to the ones I witnessed at the Vegas Star.

Hammers, saws, garbage cans, garden rakes, rubber fishing boots, tire irons, and gas cans were the weapons of choice. It wasn't uncommon to see customers being hauled away in an ambulance throughout the evening. Not all of the men who demanded their money back were physically accosted. The beatings were primarily geared to problematic patrons.

Some of the more irate customers resorted to calling the police claiming that somebody had robbed them of their money at the club. Because the police had to respond to each and every complaint, it wasn't unusual to see the same set of police officers show up at the club night after night. The police were never sym-pathetic to the woes of irate customers. Instead the customer's complaints were dismissed, and the men were reminded that prostitution wasn't legal in the state of Illinois. The customer was left with no recourse. Some would make the mistake of attempting to fight with the police, which resulted in their immediate arrest. Others threatened to burn the club down or retaliate in other violent ways.

Angry passersby's often threw stones, rotten fruit, and bombs at the front door of the club. Certain customers who felt that they had

been duped threatened the lives of the dancers.

To protect themselves from the clientele or other late night predators, most of the dancers kept loaded guns on their person or in the glove compartment of their cars, myself included. Some of the women frightened by the continual threats, and eventually quit the business. Although dangerous and deviant characters were the hallmark of most strip clubs, the Vegas Star seemed to attract more than its share.

Jeffrey Dahmer was a prime example. I met Jeff on a lonely Monday night in mid-October, which was a year before the police apprehended him for multiple murders. Business was exceptionally slow that evening. On nights like these, the dancers would sit around a large table that was fairly close to the front door of the club waiting for customers to come in. Finally about 1:00 a.m., a new customer strolled through the door. The dancers were absolutely livid because a new customer meant that we would all have to go up on the stage to dance again. By 1:00

a.m., the only thing that we wanted to do was to go home. Needless to say, this customer wasn't wanted.

The doorman led the man to a table in the dark corner of the room. I watched the man robotically sit down in this chair. Moments later, one by one the dancers began to saunter over to the young-blonde man. All of the women that went over to talk to him ended up leaving his table rather abruptly. The man probably wasn't going to spend any money.

Disgusted and bored, I decided to pay him a visit. Although I knew that I was probably wasting my time, I walked over to him, pulled up a chair, and sat down.

The stoic figure didn't acknowledge my presence. The fact that he didn't want to be bothered made me want to agitate him even more. I began to converse with him in hopes that he would get up and leave. I started with asking him his name.

The man sighed and mumbled, "Jeff." Then I asked where he was from, he replied "Milwaukee, Wisconsin." By this time the waitress had come over to the table and was deliberately shining her flashlight directly into the man's eyes, causing him to wince. This was a little ploy that we would use on customers that wouldn't spend any money on us. "Look at this cute guy that I found," I said sarcastically to the waitress. "Doesn't he have a great personality? You know what? I bet you he's a talk show host or a news commentator," I remarked. The waitress and I began to laugh. The rigid silhouette sat next to me and said nothing. He reached into his pocket, pulled out his wallet, and laid it on the table. "Get me a Coke," he demanded. The waitress ignored his request and snatched his wallet off the table. I could tell

the man was getting madder and madder. “I suggest you give that back to me.” His voice was cold and unwavering. “Not until I see your driver’s license,” she insisted. “I want to see how photogenic you are.” He tried to grab his wallet from the waitress’s hand, but was unsuccessful.

The waitress rifled through his wallet and pulled out his I.D. “So,” she said, “you’re old Jeffrey Dahmer. Nice picture! Are you out on some type of prison furlough or something?” She took his driver’s license and threw it in his lap.

“Why don’t you both get lost,” he snarled. “We work here,” I replied, “why don’t you get the hell out?” He took our advice, stood up, dumped his Coke all over the table, and left. Ironically enough, one of the dancers called him a cheap fag as he walked out the door.

Over the years, the club Vegas Star had earned a reputation for being a “clip joint,” but despite the clubs toxic reputation, droves of men continued to filter through its doors.

Time flew by quickly. I was in my late thirties and still working in strip clubs. I had done nothing to change my direction. I consistently worried about my future, or shall I say, lack of it. The fact that I had never done anything constructive with my life consumed me. I longed to be free of my past, present, and future, but there was no logical way outside of committing suicide. Unfortunately, suicide wasn’t an option for me, simply because I didn’t have the nerve to do it. I seemed to be losing my battle against depression. It had become increas-ingly difficult for me to get out of bed in the afternoon even though I had slept for thirteen hours. I had emotionally hit rock bottom, and I knew it. Convinced that I needed some type of help, I began seeing a mental health therapist, who turned out to be quite helpful. After several months of therapy, I managed to push myself into going to college to pursue a degree. For the very first time in my life, I had actually done something that I felt good about. I went to school part-time for several years and earned several degrees in the process. My area of study was in Human Services, but even my new education couldn’t pull me out of the clubs. I was afraid to go out into the real world, because I felt that I wouldn’t fit in. Although I was educated, I still felt isolated from mainstream society. It was this irrational fear that kept me chained to the strip clubs, and I had nobody to blame but myself.

I continued to work at the Vegas Star for the next seven years. I was now approaching forty-five, and only five years away from the much-dreaded age of fifty. My days in this business were numbered, regardless of how attractive I still was. The business was still booming at the Vegas Star, so I figured I had another year or two left to work at this club. Adrian and Saydra, the owners of the club, no longer came

around. They were replaced with a new, even more dysfunctional management team. The details of this change were never revealed.

By now, most of the Chicagoland strip clubs were shut down as a result of Operation Safe Bet. The Vegas Star remained open, but not without a struggle. It too was under constant scrutiny by the law. Nevertheless, this club and a few others managed to keep its doors open.

I wasn't oblivious to the fact that the club was treading on thin ice. I had to make as much money as I could in the time that I had left. In order to accomplish this, I decided that I would see customers outside of the club for sexless lunch dates. I wasn't particularly thrilled with the idea, but I was through letting the club owners take another dime of my hard earned money. The first thing I did was develop a fee schedule. I planned to charge the guys a thousand dollars for an hour of my time. This fee would also cover the cost of my time at the restaurant of my choice. Payment was due as soon as we were seated in the restaurant. No payment meant no lunch.

It was imperative that I solicited the right kind of customers for this particular endeavor. I came up with a psychological profile of the men that would best qualify. First, it was of paramount importance that the men have low self-esteem.

Fortunately, these were a dime a dozen. Poor self-image was common to just about every man that walked through the doors of a strip club. Secondly, the men would have to possess a good sense of humor, be generous to a fault, and depend-able. Even though I knew that these lunch dates were of a relatively benign nature, the thought of having to spend time with these men outside the club seemed unbearable to me. In order to take some of the pressure off of myself, I decided to incorporate a business partner into my plans. The woman that I chose was a co-worker of mine who called herself Sefra. She was a very exotic looking woman who resembled Cleopatra. Sefra was extremely street smart, and more than willing to assist me in a last ditch effort to get it while we can.

Sefra and I thought up schemes designed to extract as much money out of the customers as possible in the shortest amount of time. Instead of working independently at the club, Sefra and I began to work together, which ultimately empowered us. Like two cats on the prowl, we would comb through the droves of men looking for the perfect opportunity. We developed an amusing strategy that worked quite well.

If one of us landed a customer who fit the profile, we would call the other one over to the party. We told the customers that we were roommates, sexy room-

mates. We would cruise together, arm in arm. When we spotted

the right victim, we would sit down next to him and start the show. The men ate up our act. Most of the time we would introduce ourselves as the "screw sisters" or the "kinky siamese twins." Regardless of how ridiculous or outlandish our come-on was; Sefra and I were able to coerce even the most difficult of customers to spend large amounts of money on us. When we were on the floor, the other dancers didn't stand a chance. The money hungry waitresses went along with our scams for a sizeable tip. They backed up any crazy stories that we chose to tell our customers.

We usually told the customers that we lived at a nudist camp in southern Indiana, and that we only worked at the club part-time so that we could pay our expenses. We kept them amused with fabricated stories of sexual activities that we took part in at the nudist camp. Sometimes we would invite them to dine with us at the nude restaurant that was supposedly located on the grounds of the camp.

Night after night, Sefra and I double teamed the customers, and made nothing but money in the process. Our business partnership had increased our earning potential by at least fifty-percent. Although we were doing quite well, it took us several months before we stumbled across the right candidate for a lunch date.

One day, when we least expected it, our messiah walked through the doors. Our dream date crept into the club on a busy Saturday night with a smile on his face and a wallet full of cash. His appearance was fairly nondescript, bordering on homely. He was definitely our kind of man.

I approached him shortly after the doorman seated him at a table. I could tell by looking at him that he was easy. I walked over to where he was sitting and introduced myself as Sathen. I smiled and told him that he reminded me of one of my ex-husbands. The customer laughed. "I'm Rudy," he said, "pull up a chair." A couple of seconds after I sat down the waitress showed up. She asked the man if he wanted to buy me a drink. He cheerfully handed the waitress a couple of $100

bills and told her to bring me whatever I wanted. After he bought me the drink, I asked Rudy if he would like to spend some time alone with me in the "love booth." He seemed very interested and asked me how much. When I told him $1,500, he didn't bat an eye. When the waitress returned with my $200 glass of water, I asked him if he was ready to go have a time that "he would never forget."

Rudy jumped at the chance. Within minutes, he had surrendered fifteen crisp $100 bills over to the waitress. From where I was sitting, I could see that he had quite a bit more cash left in his wallet. I pinched the side of the waitress's leg, which was a signal to her to hit the man up for more money. She responded to the familiar cue.

Shining the flashlight down her generous cleavage, she seductively brushes her breast across the man's face. Needless to say, the customer was completely mesmerized by the view. "Listen honey," the woman said, "how would you like Sathen to give you the ultimate VIP treatment tonight?" Before the man had a chance to answer, I intentionally began to stroke his outer thigh.

The sheepish little man glanced at me and nodded his head yes. "How much more?" he quickly inquired. Before I answered him, I lightly brushed the side of his homely face with my fingers while simultaneously letting out a fake, but convincing moan. "Just another measly couple of thousand dollars honey, that's all."

For a split second there was dead silence. The customer took a deep breath. I could tell by the way he had hesitated that there was a chance that he may not go for it. When this happened, I usually offered to introduce the man to my sexy roommate. "Listen honey," I said as I moved closer to him while strategically placed my hand on his leg, "just give the waitress the money, and if you play your cards right, I'll throw in my sexy roommate." Even the most skeptical of customers couldn't refuse this offer. Rudy took the bait just like I had hoped. "I'm game!" he replied. "Good," the waitress said. "Just give me the money and I'll leave the three of you alone for a very long time." Rudy reached into his shirt pocket and pulled out a shiny brand new platinum Visa card. The waitress's eyes lit up as she slowly slid the credit card out of the man's small sweaty hand. Now it was time for the waitress and me to try and get a substantial tip. The dancers and waitresses only made twenty-percent of all sales, so we always solicited cash tips for ourselves to compensate for the loss. We usually asked for a couple hundred dollars a piece for starters. This was the tricky part because if you didn't handle it right, you could very easily blow the whole deal. I always made a point to move as close to the customer as possible when asking for a tip or while they signed their credit card voucher. The close body contact served as a distraction. It kept the men from having second thoughts. In the case of Rudy, I simply put my arm around his under-developed slumped shoulders and told him how wonderful he smelled. Nothing could have been further from the truth. This guy smelled like last weeks dirty socks. Rudy reached into his humble looking wallet and pulled out four $100 bills and divided them up between the waitress and myself.

Whenever a patron chose to pay with a credit card, it was mandated that the waitress ask to see the man's driver's license. The driver's license was then taken up to the bar where a copy of it was xeroxed off for safekeeping. This way the customer could be identified in case there was a problem. The waitress told Rudy that she would be right back with his license and credit card voucher. I made sexy small

talk with him while she was gone. When she returned, Rudy quickly signed his credit card voucher. Moments later, I escorted Rudy over to the darkest booth in the room and ordered him to slide in.

"Don't go away," I said as I leaned into him, "I'm going to go get my sexy roommate." The unsuspecting man smiled. He assured me that he wasn't going anywhere. I found Sefra huddled up in a dark corner with one of her sleazy customers by the name of Angelo. He was a 300-pound Italian blimp that usually only spent $200 on Sefra at the table buying her glasses of water. In other words, he was cheap and refused to go to the booth. I walked over to the table where Sefra and Humpty Dumpty were sitting. Sefra was slouched in her chair with a half lit cigarette lazily dangling from the corner of her perfectly painted mouth.

Her dream date was eagerly rubbing her back. I interrupted the happy couple so that I could ask Sefra to go into the dressing room with me. I used the excuse that I needed to borrow one of her costumes.

Sefra excused herself from Angelo, and together we walked toward the direction of the dressing room. I explained to her that I had landed a big spender and that I needed her to join me in the booth. Sefra ditched her worthless customer, and joined Rudy and I in the booth. When Rudy met Sefra he was in seventh heaven.

"This must be a dream!" he exclaimed. "How did I get so lucky," he asked. Rudy was totally mesmerized by our presence and couldn't spend his money fast enough.

He ended up spending quite a lot of money on the both of us that evening. Rudy was one of the few customers that actually left happy even though the man basically received nothing for his money. He began to pay homage to the club on Tuesday nights.

After about eight weeks worth of Rudy's Tuesday night visits, Sefra and I decided that he would probably make a good candidate for a lunch date. When we approached Rudy with our lunch date proposal, he was very receptive to the idea.

We began to see him on Monday afternoons for lunch at a restaurant located inside of a shopping mall. The three of us always met at the same place and time every week. There were two reasons why we chose to have lunch at a restaurant inside of a shopping mall with Rudy. The obvious being that there was a lot of people around. The other reason was that Rudy would occasionally take the two of us on shopping sprees, so we wanted to keep everything under one roof. I completely controlled these lunch dates, and also the price of them. Sefra and I charged Rudy $4,000 for two hours of our time at the restaurant. I absolutely hated to go to lunch with this man, even though I knew that I was going to make a few thousand dollars for

just a couple hours of work. Our lunch escapades with Rudy lasted for approximately one year, and then his funds began to run out.

This was usually the case with most steady customers. Eventually the well would run dry. Rudy began to come up short with our lunch money. There were a few times that he only brought $2,000 along to the restaurant and expected Sefra and I to split it. Rudy insisted that he was having financial problems and had to cut back. Realizing that the party was over, Sefra and I cut him loose and turned him over to one of the other dancers that we worked with. Rudy ended up spending some money on his new friend for the next couple of months, and then disappeared from the scene completely.

After our stint with Rudy ended, Sefra and I didn't run across another viable lunch date candidate for quite some time. However, I still made a sizable amount of money off of the customers that we cultivated together at the club.

Night after night, the two of us carefully combed the crowds of men looking for a lucrative opportunity. Every evening we ran across a new and exciting assortment of unsavory characters. Because Sefra and I were veterans in the business, we had become virtually immune to all of the maleficent personalities that we ran across.

Just when we thought that we had met the most perverse individual that ever walked the face of the earth; an even sicker one would cross our path. This was the case with "needle man." My co-worker and I met this person one night while we were cruising the room. This fine specimen of a human being was sitting alone. Not one dancer had approached him since he came into the club. Sefra and I had nothing better to do, so we decided to pay him a visit. At first, he wasn't especially receptive to our company; but eventually we were able to break him down.

Strip clubs were notoriously dark, making it difficult to clearly see the person sitting next to you. This man was extremely difficult to understand. At first, we thought that he had some sort of a speech impediment, because he mumbled when he spoke. Anxious to get on with the scam, Sefra and I bypassed the waitress. We asked the man if he wanted to go to the love booth with us. The man nodded his head yes. "Do you have any money on you," I inquired. He shook his head no. Then we immediately hit him up for a credit card. He opened up his wallet and handed Sefra his Master Charge card. She took the credit card from the stranger and went to retrieve the waitress. Before I knew it, Sefra and the waitress had returned. The waitress told the customer that if he spent $3,000, he could spend a very long time alone with Sefra and me. The man mumbled something but none of us could make out what he had just said. The waitress, who wasn't the most patient of people, shined her flashlight on the man's face. "Are

you O.K.?" she asked. The man didn't respond. The waitress continued to scan the man's face with her flashlight. "What's that on the side of your mouth?" she inquired. The customer quickly covered his mouth with his hand. The man was obviously trying to hide something. "What's on your face?" the waitress asked again. The customer said nothing. "Are you deaf or something, move your damn hand!" she ordered. The man didn't cooperate so the waitress took it upon herself to move the man's hand for him. She deliberately shined her flashlight on the area of his face that he was trying to conceal. There was something hanging from the right side of the man's mouth. Further investigation revealed that this man had half of his mouth-sewed shut with a needle and thread. The needle still dangled freely from the corner of his mouth. His lips looked misshapen and heavily scarred as if they had been burned in a fire. The three of us could hardly believe what we saw. To say that we were repulsed would have been an understatement.

Sefra grabbed my arm. "What the hell is that?" she asked me. "I don't know," I replied. "The guy is some kind of a masochist. I can't deal with this," Sefra pleaded. "What do you care?" I said. "It's dark in here, and you don't have to look at him!"

"Give me a break," Sefra said as she lit up a cigarette. I glanced up at the waitress. She was still shining the beam of her flashlight on the customer's mouth. I could tell by the look on her face that she was absolutely disgusted; however, she continued on with the sale pitch. "Well honey, are you ready to go party with the girls?"

The gruesome individual managed to mutter something that sounded like a "yes." The waitress took the man's credit card and proceeded to run it through for $3,000. After the customer signed his voucher, Sefra and I took him over to the booth, but instead of sandwiching the man between the both of us like we usually did, we made him get in the booth first. I ended up sitting directly next to the man because Sefra refused to. Sefra sat on my lap. "What are we suppose to do with this creep?" Sefra whispered to me, "I can't believe this shit!"

I started to laugh, but Sefra didn't find the situation as humorous as I did.

She didn't have a strong stomach like me. "Why don't you give the guy a little kiss?" I told her. Sefra brushed her heavy hair away from her pretty face. "Very funny," she said. Sensing that Sefra was getting restless, I sent her to get me a cup of coffee. "Do you think this freak will spend anymore?" she asked. "How the hell should I know," I said, "just hurry back." Sefra jumped off my lap and headed toward the bar.

I was now completely alone with this monster. Due to the fact

that half the man's mouth was sewn closed, he wasn't exactly a candidate for conversation. Besieged by curiosity, I decided to ask him if he was the one who sewed his mouth closed or if someone else had done it for him. The man pointed to himself. Then he began to slide up the shirtsleeve of his left arm. Baffled by the man's action, I lit a match so that I could see what he was trying to show me. The entire surface of his arm was grotesquely scarred with what appeared to be cigarette burns. The ghastly sight left me speechless. I couldn't believe that I was actually sitting in the booth with some scarred up freak that had just signed a credit card voucher for $3,000.

Sefra had taken off ten minutes ago and still had not returned. I decided to go hunt her down and grab myself a cup of coffee in the process. I wanted to get away from the customer even if it would only be for a moment. I told him that I would be back in a few minutes. As I stood up to leave the booth, the man began to omit a strange gurgling noise while simultaneously sliding down off the seat.

At first I thought that the man was having a seizure or that he was a psychotic of sorts. Whatever the case, I didn't want to deal with the situation, so I went to get the waitress. From where I was standing, I could see a waitress standing across the room shining her flashlight into the wallet of another willing customer. I strolled over to where she stood and boldly interrupted her business transaction. I told her to go check on my customer because he was acting very strange. The waitress humored me and walked over to the booth where I had been sitting with the dis-figured man.

A few minutes later, she came running out into the foyer of the club screaming for the aid of one of the doormen. The doorman followed the waitress over to the booth only to discover that the man had completely collapsed. The doorman pulled the customer out of the booth and laid him down on the floor while the waitress called 9-1-1. When the paramedics arrived, they fervently tried to revive the unidentified stranger, but it was to no avail. The man had apparently died of a heart attack, and was pronounced dead on the way to the hospital. Later that evening, a man's wedding band was found on the floor of the booth where the customer had died. Apparently, the ring had fallen from one of the deceased man's pockets during the commotion.

About three weeks after this incident, another lunch date opportunity happened to cross my path. Vic was a tall, polished-looking man and a self-made multi-mil-lionaire. He had a lot of free time on his hands, and plenty of money to blow.

Recently divorced at the age of sixty-five, Vic was obsessed with the idea of trying to recapture the thrills of yesteryear. We crossed paths one night at the Vegas Star. Mesmerized by my appearance, Vic

made the costly mistake of requesting my company after I had just gotten off the stage. A sex addict in every sense of the word, Vic's days were filled with rendezvous with hookers and cruising adult bookstores. His evenings were spent frequenting strip clubs, where he would solicit the dancers to have sex with him. On top of being a sex addict, Vic was also a confirmed alcoholic caught up in a whirlwind of self-destruction. His drinking problem fueled his sex addiction. His sex addiction caused him to drink.

Vic was a merry-go-round with no way off. He was truly his own worst enemy.

Vic was a fast mover and propositioned me to have lunch with him about fifteen minutes after we met, but I refused his offer. I knew what kind of "lunch date" he had in mind, and that certainly wasn't compatible with my intentions. Vic was a little disappointed that I turned down his offer, so I really didn't anticipate seeing him again. But Vic was a glutton for punishment, and two nights later he was back at the club requesting my company. I spent a couple of hours talking to him that evening. He bought me about forty-five glasses of water at $20 a piece. As long as he was willing to keep shelling out the cash, I was willing to stay. During this time, I learned that Vic had a tremendous sense of humor. This was a quality that I considered to be of paramount importance, especially if your intentions were to take the man for an expensive ride. I especially liked the fact that he knew I was just after his money, and still managed to find humor in it. Right before he left to go home, he asked me if I would reconsider his offer for lunch. I told him that I might consider meeting him for a sexless lunch date, if he came into the club and handed me an envelope with $1,000 in it. Vic laughed at my proposition. "Someone would have to be a desperate fool to do something like that," he commented. However the following night, Vic came into the club and handed me a crumpled up envelope filled with twenty-dollar bills that equaled the sum of $1,000.

For the next twelve months, I would meet Vic once a week at a different restaurant for lunch. I made sure that he completely understood the conditions of our lunch dates. My fee was $2,000 for two hours of my time at a restaurant that was geographically convenient for both of us. Vic was responsible for picking up the lunch tab, and there would be no sex. These lunch dates with him were always amusing and consisted of nothing more than humorous conversation and a good meal. On occasion, Vic would get extremely drunk and make a total fool out of himself in public. Our dates were cut short if this happened, but not at my expense. After our lunch dates, Vic would usually solicit the services of a prostitute for the meager fee of $300.

A year of lunch dates had gone by before Vic came to the bleak conclusion that our relationship would never be a physical one. We dissolved our business relationship, and went our separate ways. Two months later, Vic contacted me at the Vegas Star. He told me that he had met somebody at the adult bookstore that he felt might be a lucrative opportunity for Sefra and I. The man's name was Adam, and he had supposedly planned to stop by the club to meet us in the near future.

Adam showed up at the club three days after Vic's phone call. He was a middle-aged man who happened to be a child psychologist. Adam claimed that he had a very lucrative practice in a nearby affluent suburb. I disliked him from the beginning for several reasons. The first thing that rubbed me the wrong way was his appearance. He was definitely hard to look at even in the dark. Adam was exceptionally thin to the point of looking sickly. His face had a gaunt unsettling look about it reminiscent of a cancer victim. Sefra and I spent a couple of hours with the man talking to him at the table. Adam spent close to $500 on glasses of water for us. Sefra and I tried our best to coerce him into spending a few thousand dollars to go into the secluded area with us, but our efforts were to no avail.

The man simply wouldn't budge. Finally, after much perseverance, the two of us managed to talk him into spending the money.

At first he offered to pay with a credit card, but then he changed his mind. Adam reached into the back pocket of his trousers and pulled out a meticulously folded wad of money held together by a shiny gold money clip. "Whom do I pay?" he asked. Sefra and I glanced at each other. The waitress was nowhere to be seen.

Sefra reached around the man's bony shoulders and gently pulled a piece of my hair. I knew this cue all to well. Sefra wanted me to take the money. "I have a great idea," I said to the man, "why don't you just give us the money and we will sit here with you at the table until the club closes at 4:00 a.m." It was currently 3:30 in the morning. The man hesitated and was obviously having second thoughts about spending the money. "What am I going to get for my money?" he asked. I felt like telling him that he would get what he deserved, but I didn't.

Sensing that the man was on the verge of changing his mind, Sefra moved closer to Adam. She pulled the top of her dress down revealing a very sexy red satin bra.

"Do you like the view?" The ugly man's face lit up like a Christmas tree. He went to grab one of her breasts. Like the old pro that she was, Sefra successfully evaded his reach. "No honey, not now," she said, "there are too many people around."

By now the club had pretty much cleared out. Three customers were sitting at the front row of the club watching the show. A small group of dancers that were huddled together in a corner were busy flinging ice cubes at the backs of the remaining customer's heads. Sefra was great at leading the men on, but she could never close the sale. Not wanting to waste anymore time, I stepped up to the plate.

"Honey, don't worry, we know what we're doing, just give me the money because were running out of time." He began to slowly pull the money out of the money clip, bill by bill. Sefra slid the money off of the table and quickly stuffed it in her bra, while I watched the room to make sure that the waitress wasn't around. "I am going to trust you two," the man said as he slid the remainder of his money back into his pocket. That's your misfortune, I thought to myself. In an effort to pacify the man, Sefra and I moved him over to another table that provided the illusion of privacy. We conversed with him for awhile and then Adam asked us if we would like to meet his wife. "You didn't tell us that you were married, honey," Sefra commented. "It must have slipped my mind," Adam said.

"You girls would love my wife. She's a real opened minded type of gal, lets me do just about anything I want. It's hard to top that. As a matter of fact, she was in Playboy magazine a few years ago," he boasted. "Really," I said trying to act interested even though I was dead tired. "She's out in the car waiting for me. Do you girls mind if I bring her in? She's probably bored stiff by now," he commented. I looked down at my watch. It was practically 4:00 in the morning. "It's getting late," I protested, "how about if we meet her another time?" He became angry.

"Give me my money back," he demanded. I could feel the man's leg frantically shaking under the table. Sefra poked me in the arm while giving me a dirty look.

"We would love to meet your wife, honey, I quickly said, why don't you go out and get her." I was absolutely livid because I wanted to go home. Yet, in the same token, I didn't want to have to give the guy his money back either. Therefore, I had no other choice but to go along with the program. Sefra laid in on me as soon as he left to go outside, "If you don't want the money that's fine, but don't blow it for me!" Her comment infuriated me. "Look," I argued, "I'm not sitting here until 5:00 a.m. with some freaky swingers, so you better think of a way to get rid of him fast." Sefra rolled her eyes. "Look, he's coming back, just be cool, this won't take long," she insisted. Adam was making his way back to the table; but instead of having a woman with him, he was carrying a large plastic bag.

"Where's your wife?" I inquired. "She's right here," the man said as he opened the bag and proceeded to pull out a limp female like

form. “What is that?” I asked. Sefra walked over to where the man was standing and lit a match. “It’s my wife,” he insisted. “She’s really sexy,” Sefra remarked, “can I see her?” I grabbed Sefra’s arm and pulled her over to the side. “It’s some stupid blow up doll, who cares,” I insisted, “we’ve got his money. Now let’s get him out of here,” I said.

“What if he’s got more money?” she protested. “So what if he does? I’m too tired to deal with this creep,” I snapped. “Let’s just go along with it and maybe we can get more out of him,” she pleaded. She did have a valid point, so I quickly changed my attitude. By now Adam had removed the object from the bag, and had propped it up on a nearby chair. “She’s beautiful,” Sefra said. “Let me go get a flashlight so that I can get a better look at her.” Sefra returned a few minutes later with a large black flashlight that she had taken from one of the doormen.

She shined the light on the limp silhouette that was flopped over the chair. It was definitely a blow-up doll, a naked one to be exact, with lifelike proportions. The doll had long black hair, huge breasts, and a large wide-open mouth. There was something hanging around the dolls neck that resembled a noose of some sort.

“What’s that around your wife’s neck?” Sefra asked. “That’s her favorite necklace, she likes to wear it when she gets frisky,” he calmly commented. Sefra began to run her hand over the body of the doll, but removed it quickly and wiped her hand on the side of her dress. “What the hell is all over this thing?” Sefra yelled,

“It’s disgusting!” I took the flashlight from Sefra’s hand and began to shine the light on the body of the doll.

“Knock it off,” he said as he pulled the doll away from my reach. I in turn, ripped the doll right out of the man’s hand, “I want to see what’s all over this thing, so I’m taking your bride into the bathroom for a few minutes.”

In order to avoid touching the doll, I dragged the thing by its long black hair across the floor and into the women’s washroom. When I opened the door to the ladies washroom, clouds of marijuana smoke bombarded me. Several of my co-workers were standing in the bathroom smoking dope. They noticed the blow up doll immediately and began to laugh.

“Did some guy murder his wife?” some one yelled.

“Something like that,” I replied.

“What’s all that red stuff all over it?” one of the dancers asked as she took another hit off of the joint. I looked down at the doll that was now sprawled across the dirty bathroom floor. The woman was right. There was something red smeared all over the surface of the hideous looking doll. I dragged the doll by one of its legs over to the bathroom sink because the light was brighter over there. I took a piece of paper

towel and wiped some of the red substance off of the doll's face. "What the hell is this? This looks like blood!" I exclaimed. I threw the grotesque doll into the corner of the bathroom and quickly begun to wash my hands. One of the dancers over heard my comment and began to examine the doll herself. "That's blood alright. Where did you get this thing anyways?" she asked. I told her that a customer had just brought it into the club.

"You always find the sick ones, Sathen," she commented.

"That's what I am best at," I said.

"I wonder if that blood is from an animal or human?" she asked.

I felt a sudden wave of nausea come over me. I left the bloody doll in the ladies room and went back over to the table where Sefra was sitting.

"Where the hell have you been? The guy left ten minutes ago," she said.

"Really," I remarked, "what a shame."

I asked her where he went. She told me that he went home to get his credit card.

"What did you do with that stupid doll?" she inquired.

"You mean that disgusting thing with blood all over it?" I commented.

"Is that the stuff that I felt on the doll?" she asked.

"Why don't you take a walk to the bathroom and see for yourself," I suggested.

"I'll take your word for it," Sefra replied.

I asked her if she thought that Adam was really going to come back. She seemed to think that he was.

About thirty minutes later our dream date returned with a credit card in his hand. The waitress wasted no time and immediately ran the card through for a significant amount of money. She presented the voucher to the customer for his signature. As soon as the man signed the credit card voucher, Sefra and I took him over to one of the darkest booths in the club.

"What's this?" the man inquired, "I thought we were going to a bedroom."

"Don't worry about it," I said as I pushed him into the booth. "You're going to love it. This is a lot kinkier."

"That's right," Sefra injected, "bedrooms are boring."

The ugly man agreed. "By the way," he said, "what did you girls do with my wife?"

I told him that she was in the bathroom freshening up. Sefra laughed.

"What was that red sticky stuff all over your doll, honey?" Sefra asked.

“She got a little too spunky for her own good. So, I had to show her who’s boss. It’s just a little blood from my hand,” the man insisted.

Sefra and I winced. Suddenly Adam tried to shove his hand down the front of Sefra’s bra. Sefra grabbed the man’s hand and pulled it away from her body. “We’ll get to that later. First we want you to tell us your deepest and darkest fantasies,” she crooned.

The man smirked. “You don’t even want to know what my fantasies are.”

Sefra pinched my arm. He continued to talk, “You two aren’t going to believe this, but I’m a fifty-one year old virgin. That’s why I came in here; it’s time for me to have sex with a real woman.”

“Really,” I said, “you’re so handsome I find that hard to believe.” Sefra and I laughed.

“What’s so funny?” the man asked.

“Nothing really,” I said, “I think my sexy roommate and I have had a little too much to drink.”

The stupid man believed me. The truth of the matter was that I didn’t drink, and Sefra was blown away on heroin. “I have a good idea,” Sefra said, “Why don’t we get your wife out of the bathroom and you can show us how you make love to her.”

“That’s not what I paid for,” the man protested. “We know that honey,” I said in an attempt to pacify him, “but it would really turn us on.”

“O.K., I’ll do it, but I just want you ladies to know that I’m through spending money tonight. I’ve reached my limit on my credit card,”

he insisted. In most cases, Sefra and I were usually able to coerce the men into spending more money on us in spite of their reservations. However, in this particular instance, we didn’t even try. I had a feeling that once he discovered that he wasn’t going to get anything for his money, he could become a problem. It was a gamble that wasn’t worth taking. Besides, there was a room full of other lucrative opportunities waiting for us.

Sefra and I spent another ten minutes with the man before we told him that his time with us was up. Surprisingly enough, he didn’t appear to be upset when we told him that the party was over. As a matter of fact, he thanked us for the “good time.” He remained in the club for several minutes after Sefra and I parted company with him, then the man quietly left. Later on in the evening, Sefra decided to run out to a twenty-four hour grocery store to buy some cigarettes. When she returned from her errand, she mentioned to me that she had seen a man lurking around the parking lot of the club. Sefra claimed that she couldn’t tell what the man looked like because it was too dark outside.

After work that night, Sefra and I decided to go out to breakfast together at a local after-hour restaurant. We left Sefra's eleven-year-old car sitting in the parking lot of the club and took mine instead. A couple of hours later, I dropped Sefra back off at her car and proceeded to go home. By 6:00 in the morning, I was in bed and fast asleep. I was awakened by the sound of my doorbell at approximately 7:00 a.m. Ordinarily, I wouldn't have answered it, but I knew that my roommate had gone out for the evening and it was quite possible that she had locked herself out. I got out of bed and answered the door. I was surprised when I discovered that it was Sefra standing on my doorstep instead of my roommate.

"You're not going to believe what just happened to me," Sefra said breathlessly,

"that creep that we had last night that brought in that blow up doll was hiding in the trunk of my car, and came through the back seat while I was driving." It took me a few minutes to absorb what she had just said. "You've got to be kidding," I replied. Sefra proceeded to tell me the story. After I had dropped her off that morning at her car, she pulled out onto the dark stretch of highway that ran directly in front of the club. About ten minutes later, she heard a strange noise. It seemed to be coming from the backseat of her car. Sefra ignored the noise and continued to drive. Suddenly, she heard a loud clamor and the sound of a man's voice. Before she knew it, she had been grabbed by the throat and had a gun pointed at the back of her head. The man instructed Sefra to pull over, but she refused to. She knew that if she did what the man said, he would have killed her.

Sefra was a very street-smart woman who had worked in strip clubs for over twenty-four years, so she knew how to handle unsavory characters. It was this knowledge that ultimately saved her life. Somehow she was able con the man to getting out of her car by promising to give him a bag of heroin that she had stashed in her glove compartment. She left her attacker on the side of a dark rural highway holding the bag of drugs. Sefra chose not to report the incident to the police, because she had been busted on drug charges in the past. The incident was soon forgotten and the customer was never seen in the club again.

A few years of my life had flown by. Although I owned my own home and had successfully completed two Associates degrees and a Bachelor in Human Services, I still felt chronically depressed and restless. A concerned friend of mine suggested that I have my physician prescribe an antidepressant for me to try. I didn't particularly relish the idea of having to resort to taking psychotropic medication for relief, but I realized that I had to do something about my problem. I took my friends advice, and contacted a mental health

clinic. I made an appointment to see a psychiatrist, and was immediately issued a prescription for Prozac. Four weeks later, I was feeling better and was able to function again.

Determined to make as much money as possible while we still could, Sefra and I relentlessly searched for another big spender. Our search led us to a mysterious individual by the name of Ken. He was just another customer, another mope, and another wallet. Ken was Sefra's find, not mine. I will give credit where credit is due. Sefra was good at roping the guys in, because she came across as being unassuming. However, she wasn't able to extract large amounts of money from the guys as easily as I could. Sefra couldn't close the sale. This particular customer had a lot of money on him. Sefra had two choices. She could have kept him to herself, and spent more time with him. If she did that, she would make considerably less money. Her second choice would be to call me into the party and make a lot more money in less than half the time. Sefra was a lot of things, but stupid wasn't one of them. She brought me over to meet the man, and introduced me as her sexy roommate. My first impression of this person wasn't a particularly good one. In fact, I got very bad vibes from him, but I ignored the unsettling feeling and proceeded to get on with the scam. Sefra wasn't always the best judge of character, especially when she became desperate for money. Nevertheless, I threw caution to the wind. Ken was ready and willing to spend a lot of money on Sefra and me. In less than an hour, he had already spent close to $5,000 on us.

Ken was probably somewhere in his early to mid-forties and stood about 5 feet 10 inches. He was on the stocky side and had a build like a Marine Sergeant. He appeared to be very nervous. His large dark eyes continually darted around the interior of the club. It was almost as if he was expecting to see someone or something that he was trying to avoid. The man was a weirdo. There was no doubt about it, but as long as he was willing to spend the money, Sefra and I were willing to stay. The strange man ended up spending a couple of hours with us. During this time, we pretended to be mesmerized by his absurd stories. Ken claimed that he worked for a top-secret government agency that required him to travel outside the country on a moments notice. He also claimed that he lived with his aged father in Orland Park, Illinois. Ken expressed a profound interest in guns and boasted that he had quite an impressive gun arsenal at his home. Around 2:30 in the morning, he informed us that he had to get home, because he was anticipating an important phone call from a government co-worker. Sefra and I were relieved to learn that he was leaving. By now, we were both burned out on his crazy conversation. Immediately after Ken's departure, we went into the lady's room to count all the

tips that he had given us behind the waitresses back. We counted close to $4,000 between the two of us.

Sefra was impressed by the amount of money that Ken had spent. I found nothing impressive about it at all. Blinded by the almighty dollar, she suggested that we set up a lunch date with him. I told Sefra that I thought her suggestion was rather premature. “There’s something wrong with that guy,” I said.

Sefra was completely indifferent to my concerns. “You think everyone is a creep,” she argued. “He’s just some type of gun freak and that’s all. Ken’s harmless,” she insisted.

I strongly disagreed with her. As far as I was concerned, any delusional gun freak that was stupid enough to drop huge amounts of money in a strip club could hardly be deemed harmless. Sefra knew that she wasn’t going to win this argument. Frustrated, she flicked her lit cigarette into one of the filthy toilet bowls, and stomped angrily out of the bathroom.

The next night, our newly found friend reappeared at approximately the same time that he had arrived the night before. Sefra was the first one to spot him, and immediately came into the dressing room to retrieve me. “Guess who’s here?” she said. I asked her if it was Richard Speck. I couldn’t have sounded more disinterested. Some of the dancers overheard my comment and began to laugh. “Just about,” Sefra sarcastically replied, “sicko’s back and he brought a lot more money with him. He wants to see you. Hurry up, we’re sitting at the same table as we were last night.” I took a deep breath as I stood up from my chair. I knew I was in store for another lucrative, but mentally draining night. Sefra, who was usually stoned on heroin, didn’t dread his company nearly as much as I did. I guess her drug addiction was her ultimate incentive. Mine was merely my bank account.

I walked through the dressing room doors, and onto the main floor. I immediately spotted Sefra’s glittering silhouette from across the room. I begrudgingly walked over to the table where Sefra and Ken sat patiently waiting for me. I pulled up a chair and joined them. “Hey Sathen, can you believe it! Our man came back,” Sefra said as she made a derogatory hand signal behind his back. “I see that,” I commented. Sefra nudged Ken on his arm and said, “Tell Sathen what you were doing tonight.” Ken took a deep breath. “I was just finishing up an important government assignment not too far from here,” he claimed. “Is that so?” I remarked. He was probably just released from the Elgin State Mental Hospital, I thought to myself. “Were you out in Elgin?” I asked. Sefra started to laugh. She knew what I was implying. My comment flew right over Ken’s head.

“Nope, I can’t tell you where I was. I’m afraid that’s privileged

information," Ken said as he bowed his head and scratched his left ear. Sefra and I glanced at each other. I gave her a slight nod. Without saying a word, Sefra and I were able to communicate with each other. It was time to cut the small talk. The meter was ticking. "Sathen and I really missed you," Sefra said while fondling the gold electroplated chain that hung around the man's neck.

"That's right," I added, "I couldn't get my mind off of you."

Ken's smile was smug. "You girls are great," he replied.

I reached over and gave him a hug. In the process, I noticed that there was a black leather travel bag parked next to Ken's chair.

"Is that your bag?" I inquired. I was concerned that there might be a gun hiding in it.

"Don't worry about it," he snapped, "I couldn't leave the bag in the car. It's classified information."

Sefra sensed that Ken was becoming a little edgy. She was worried that he was going to walk out the door without spending any money, so she began to rub the back of his neck in an attempt to calm him down.

"Are you going to party with us tonight, honey?" Sefra's voice was soft and soothing.

"I'm financially prepared if that's what you mean," he said. Sefra wasted no time in flagging down the nearest waitress.

As soon as Ken paid his dues, Sefra and I led him away to the same old dingy booth that we had sat in the previous evening. This evening turned out to be a repeat performance of the night before; even the gist of the conversation remained the same. Around 2:30 in the morning, Ken left the club using the same excuse as he did the night before about a phone call from a government co-worker. I figured that this was just another one of his fabricated stories.

Ken began to come into the club once a week, and it was always on a Monday night. He consistently spent the same amount of money on us as he bragged about his secret-service job and his impressive weaponry collection. After a few months of Ken's visits, Sefra and I decided to hit him up for a lunch date scenario. Against my better judgement, we set up a date to meet him at a nearby upscale restaurant. The agreement was that Sefra and I would spend two hours with him at lunch for the sum total of $4,000. We also made it perfectly clear that no sex was included. Ken eagerly accepted our offer, and for the next several months, Sefra and I would meet him in various restaurants. Ken seemed to be perfectly content with this arrangement for the first couple of months, but then one-day things began to change. He began to pressure us to give him our home phone number, which naturally we weren't about to do. In an attempt to temporarily pacify him, we gave him the phone number to the club.

We used the excuse that we were living with some other people, and that we didn't want them to know our business. We promised to give him our home number after we moved.

Before long, Ken began to call either Sefra or myself at the club just about every night that we were scheduled to work. He wanted to meet us after work or have us come over to his house on the nights that his father wasn't home. Obviously, that wasn't about to happen; so Sefra and I had to keep inventing excuses as to why we couldn't see him after work. Unfortunately, Ken was very persistent.

Eventually the bartender began to complain to the doormen about all the calls that he had been receiving for Sefra and me. According to him, some man had been calling anywhere from fifteen to twenty times a night wanting to talk to us.

The bartender kept telling the caller that we were busy or up on the stage dancing hoping to deter him, but nothing worked. He was relentless. The bartender described the caller's voice as sounding muffled and difficult to understand.

Word traveled fast at the club, and it wasn't long until the excessive phone calls were brought to the attention of Sefra and I. The bartender confronted us. We told him that we had no idea who the caller was. We both knew that Ken was a strong suspect, but we elected to keep our suspicions to ourselves.

A few nights after our confrontation with the bartender, Ken showed up unexpectedly at the club. It was a Friday night, which was a switch from his usual Monday visits. Once again, Ken, Sefra, and I huddled together at the same old table as before. The same waitress came over to our table to collect the money from Ken, but this time he only handed her two thousand dollars. I could tell that the waitress was disappointed by the look on her face. She nonchalantly asked the customer why he wasn't spending the "usual." Ken told her that he wouldn't be staying long this evening due to an urgent change in plans. I could sense that the waitress was suspicious, but she didn't challenge his excuse. Sefra and I exchanged glances. We both knew that something was up. Ken seemed nervous and preoccupied. We pretended to act concerned about him and begged him to tell us what was wrong. Ken didn't respond to our questions, instead he just sat with his head bowed down staring into his glass of coke. I could feel my patience begin to wane. Finally, he began to speak, "Listen girls, I've got some pretty bad news." The first thing that popped into my head was that he was broke and couldn't afford to spend any more money on us. I was wrong. The supposed bad news was that he had to leave town immediately to go on some special assignment overseas. Ken told us that this particular assignment was very dangerous, and that his life could be in jeopardy. Sefra and I acted alarmed, but in

reality we were relieved. He also said that he had stopped by the bank earlier that day to pull out some money for us in the event that something should happen to him while he was away. From the inside pocket of his black-leather jacket, Ken pulled out two separate bundles of rubber banded money and laid it on the table directly in front of us. "Now ladies, it's very important that one of you give me a telephone number that an authorized government agent can reach you in case of my death."

There was dead silence between the three of us. Sefra and I glanced at one another. Ken lit up a cigarette. Sefra and I both realized that one of us had to come up with a phone number if we wanted that money. The unsettling silence was finally broken. Sefra agreed to give Ken her cell phone number, and told him that she had to go get a piece of paper and pen to write it down. Minutes later, Sefra returned to the table where Ken and I were sitting. She handed him a small piece of neatly folded paper, which he immediately slid into his jacket pocket.

"This better not be a fake phone number," he said very seriously. Neither Sefra nor I acknowledged the threat. Instead, we simultaneously took the money off the table and stuffed it into the sides of our thigh-high black leather boots. Ken said nothing. Sefra and I each gave him a calculated kiss on the cheek and thanked him for the money. He didn't acknowledge our gratitude. As a matter of fact, I got the distinct feeling that he really didn't want to be with us, which by the way was alright with me. Ten minutes later, Ken told us that he had to take off to the airport. Once again, Sefra and I pretended to be upset. We walked him to the door, and gave him a big theatrical hug goodbye. Ken mechanically returned our staged embrace and then he disappeared into the dark parking lot of the club. My partner in crime and I went off into the dressing room to count the two small bundles of cash that we had taken off the table. Ken had given us close to $5,000 in twenty-dollar bills. It was a good haul, and most definitely made our night. Now neither of us had to deal with any more customers for the evening.

The following evening came all too quickly. I elected to come into work a few hours late. Because this particular management was so lackadaisical, I was able to get away with it. I strolled into the club about 10:30 p.m., and headed directly into the dressing room to get ready. The minute I entered the dressing room, I was bombarded by a couple of the dancers who informed me that Sefra had been looking for me. I was in a very hostile mood that evening and didn't want to be bothered by anybody, least of all Sefra. I completely ignored what my co-workers had just told me, and proceeded to get ready for work. Unfortunately, my few moments of solitude were abruptly interrupted

by the sound of Sefra's voice. She burst into the dressing room and slammed her cell phone on the counter a few inches from where I was sitting. "You've got to listen to these sick messages on my voicemail," she demanded. I didn't respond. "Sathen, listen to me. Sicko has been leaving us messages all damn day." I wasn't sure, but I presumed that she was talking about Ken. "And wait," she injected, "it gets better, I think he tried to follow me home last night." Sefra began to tell me her story. She pulled out of the club's parking lot at about 3:30 a.m. About five miles down the road, Sefra noticed a car sitting along the side of the road with its headlights turned off.

When she passed it, the car suddenly pulled out and followed her for at least ten miles. Sefra was finally able to lose the stalker when she got onto the expressway.

Sefra believed that it was Ken who had followed her. I was inclined to agree. I told Sefra a long time ago that I had bad vibes about the man, but she refused to listen. Now she had changed her tune. Sefra left her cell phone with me so I could listen to the messages. I took her phone into the ladies room, because the dressing room was too noisy. There were a total of seven messages to be exact. I retrieved the first message from her voicemail. It was relatively short, "Hi ladies, it's just me. Listen, give me a call. Something very important has come up, and we need to talk." I recognized the voice immediately. It definitely was Ken. The second message was rather rude, "Get off your dead ass and call me." Calls three, four, and five were hang-ups. Ken was extremely humble in call number six though. "Hi girls, look, I'm just a bit edgy. Could one of you please call me ASAP?" By the seventh call, Ken's mood had dramatically shifted from humble to blatantly hostile, "Hey, it's me Ken. Remember me? I'm the chump that gave both you bitches all that money." That call ended with the phone being smashed down. It was quite obvious that this man was going to be a problem, but how big of a problem I couldn't speculate. There was one thing that I was certain of, and that was I wouldn't go on any more lunch dates with old Ken. I was finished. If Sefra chose to continue to deal with this creep, she would have to do it without me. This situation with Ken was a prime example of why I chose not to cultivate many steady customers throughout my career.

At this point in the game, Ken had spent close to $70,000 between his visits to the club and the lunch dates. We didn't know where the money came from, nor did we care. Sefra and I weren't the only ones who scammed our customers. I had seen a lot of dancers string their steady customers along for huge amounts of money for several years. It was a grueling procedure. The women had to continuously think up new scams to use on the guys in order to extract money from them. Sefra and I weren't willing to invest that

type of time with anyone. We intended to bleed Ken as quickly as possible, and then move onto the next.

I caught up with Sefra later on that evening, and gave her the cell phone back.

She asked me what I thought we should do about Ken. I strongly suggested we dump the guy. This meant having no further contact with him. Besides, when customers became too high maintenance, it was customary for the dancers to drop them. Sefra said that she was going to have the number of her cell phone changed, so that Ken couldn't call us anymore. I strongly advised her against doing that. If Ken wouldn't be able to contact us via her cell phone, he probably would start calling us again at the club, and that was the last thing we needed.

Sefra agreed.

I worked a couple more hours that night, and went home early. I told the floor manager that I had a court date in the morning. The truth of the matter was that I was totally burned out on the whole scene, and just wanted to go home.

The next day, I drowned my sorrows at a very upscale shopping mall. I went to a high-end jewelry store and bought myself a very expensive Cartier watch. It wasn't uncommon for me to buy myself luxurious gifts. The more miserable I became, the more money I spent. The expensive things that I purchased served as a temporary distraction from my miserable life. Unfortunately, the day went by quickly. Before I knew it, it was time to go back to the dreaded Vegas Star, which the dancers commonly referred to as "prison." It was an unusually cold and rainy October night. It was perfect sleeping weather. I was tempted to call in sick, but the responsible side of me took over. I reluctantly went into work. When I arrived at the club, it was packed full of anxious men waiting to see naked women. Thick clouds of cigarette and cigar smoke loomed heavily inside the club. One of the doormen had propped open the front door of the club with an old brick in order to alleviate some of the toxic smoke. Gusts of cold, damp air quickly permeated the foyer of the building. Cars whizzed by on the street that ran directly in front of the club. Whenever the front door of the club was propped open, motorists that were passing by the club would deliberately slow down in the hopes of getting a free peek of a nude dancer. Other passengers shouted obscenities at the establishment from the windows of their cars. Jimi Hendrix music thundered from the speakers in the club. Too inebriated to dance, a drunken woman stumbled aimlessly around the stage, while trying desperately to disguise her obviously intoxicated state. The pathetic dancer was so drunk that she was actually tripping over her own feet, but she was nude and that's all it took to captivate

the audience.

Tables and booths were packed full of dancers and paying customers. Greedy waitresses quickly scurried like rats to and from the booths holding the customer's credit cards and fists full of money. Feigned laughter and well-rehearsed conversations blended in with the music. The energy in the room was high. One of the dancers landed a very prosperous customer who wanted to be beaten and humiliated. This particular customer came into the club with his limousine driver, who was an older conservative woman. The only reason she even stepped foot into an establishment such as this was to secure her fare. Little did she know that her sixty-some year old client was about ready to take on a completely different persona. Rin Tin Tin, aka the old man, was busy being walked around the club on a dog leash that he provided for himself. The dancer ordered him to get on his hands and knees and proceeded to walk him through the crowds of men.

By now, another dancer had joined the party. She was riding piggyback on the disgusting old man's humped silhouette, while hitting and kicking him to the beat of the music. The onlookers, mainly employees, roared with laughter. One of the waitresses walked over to the man and dumped a milkshake over his head.

Another dancer was feeding the man cigarette butts from a dirty ashtray. The scene was so inviting that it even attracted a few of the doormen. They collectively beat the man over the head with one of last night's pizza box containers that one of the dancers had retrieved out of a scummy garbage can.

When the human dog impersonator ran out of money, the dancers walked the man on the leash back through the crowd and over to the table where the limousine driver sat patiently waiting for her customer to return. When the limo driver saw her customer crawling on the floor with a dog leash around his neck, she was appalled to say the least. One of the dancers instructed the poor woman to drop the old man off at the nearest Save-A-Pet. Meanwhile, Sefra had landed a big fish and wanted to share him with me. This particular individual had to weigh close to 400 pounds. Sweat dripped off the grotesquely obese man's forehead as he signed his $2,500 credit card voucher in hopes of getting screwed. Sefra and I made sure that the man's fantasy came true. He got screwed all right, but not in the way that he had anticipated. To make a long story short, the customer ended up calling the police in a desperate attempt to get his money back. When the police arrived, they told the man the same story that they told all the other unhappy customers who had reported that they had been duped at the Vegas Star. "I'm sorry sir, but prostitution is illegal in the state of Illinois." The man tried to argue with the police officer, but it was a

mute point. Upset and depleted of all his funds, the customer finally gave up and left.

Although I had already made a considerable amount of money for the evening, I managed to push myself back into the crowd to make more. As I seductively walked through the latest collection of customers, I was approached by one of my favorite co-workers. The young woman was laughing hysterically. Before I knew it she had grabbed me by the arm and had pulled me over to one of the booths.

"You've got to see this," she insisted, "this creep just spent a ton of money to hump the booth." I have to admit; it was a pretty entertaining sight. Here was a man, fully clothed, humping a restaurant booth. "Aren't you proud of me?" she gloated, "I told him that it was the next best thing to real sex." I commended my friend on her achievement. After the novelty of the booth humper wore off, I decided to sit down for a while to observe the three-ring circus that was going on around me. To my immediate left were a couple of dancers passionately kissing one another in the corner of a dimly lit hallway. Homosexuality among women was common in the strip clubs. A majority of the dancers were gay, bisexual, or asexual. I can honestly say that while I was in the business, I met very few women who were entirely heterosexual. My eyes continued to scan the smoke-filled corridors of the room. Through the gray haze of smoke, I could see the silhouette of a man sitting alone in a booth sucking on what appeared to be a high-heeled boot while masturbating. Apparently the dancer who had been with him had left him high and dry, so he decided to take things into his own hands. I glanced up on to the stage. The scarlet, red-stage lights burned eerily through the veils of cigarette smoke creating the illusion of hell. The dancer that I followed was practically naked. This was a signal that she was on her last song. Realizing that it was my turn to dance next, I quickly went back into the dressing room to get ready. Just as I got back there, the dancer who had just been on the stage walked through the opening of the dusty, old-red drapes that led from the stage into the dressing room. A beautiful black and gold beaded gown hung wearily over the attractive woman's left arm. There was always a break song played in between the dancer's shows. But for some reason, the break song had been skipped. Without warning, my music began to play. The powerful voice of Janis Joplin riveted throughout the room. I slowly pulled the red stage drapes aside and reluctantly walked up onto the stage. For the next ten minutes, it would just be Janis and I. Over the years, Janis Joplin and I had become somewhat of a team. She sang the blues and I danced to them.

From the stage, I could see that the club was absolutely packed. Rigid silhouettes of faceless men filled the dark alcoves of the room.

While I was on the stage dancing, I heard someone call out my name. It was a woman's voice. My eyes skillfully scanned the room looking for the person who called out for me. Standing in the far left-hand corner of the room was Sefra frantically waving her hand, trying desperately to get my attention. A familiar bulky-looking male figure stood beside her. The lights on the stage were blinding even though they appeared dim to the onlookers. It took me a few minutes to focus, but eventually I was able to identify the man who was standing beside Sefra. Unfortunately, that man was Ken, the crazy customer who had been stalking us. I wasn't particularly happy to see him.

The fact that Ken came back into the club absolutely infuriated me. First of all, I was under the impression that Sefra and I were rid of him for awhile. Secondly, I was through with the man. The party was over, end of story. The minute that I got off the stage, I quickly got dressed and left the dressing room in a desperate attempt to avoid Sefra. Regrettably, my plan backfired. I had no more than made it out of the dressing room when Sefra flew around the corner announcing the arrival of Ken. My co-worker appeared to be upset. "Hurry up," she pleaded,

"I've been waiting for you to come out and talk to Ken."

"What for?" I said.

"It's over. I'm through with the creep," Sefra pleaded, "Will you just listen to me? He's crazy. He wants $20,000 of his money back."

"So did the last 500 idiots that we've dealt with," I sarcastically replied.

"Look," she said, "If you go talk to him, maybe we can get rid of him."

"Why can't you get rid of him," I asked.

"Because you're better at it than I am," she said. She was right about that. Sefra wasn't good at "cleaning up her messes." I kept my cool and reluctantly accompanied my partner in crime over to the table where Ken was sitting. His arms were tightly folded against his chest. I could tell by his defiant body language that he was angry. This was the side of Ken that I had seen from the very beginning; the side that Sefra refused to acknowledge.

As I approached Ken, I managed to muster a big phony smile. I put my arm around his robust shoulders while giving him a quick kiss on the cheek, but Ken wasn't especially receptive. He turned his face away from me, and threw my arm off of his shoulder. I could feel my temper begin to escalate. Still trying to be civil, I asked the man to tell me what was wrong. Ken unfolded his muscular arms long enough to take a drink from his glass of coke. "Look," he said, "I just found out that I have to leave the country permanently. I need $20,000 of my money back from you two and I'm not leaving this place until I get it."

My patience had now officially run out. This guy might have been able to intimidate Sefra, but he certainly didn't intimidate me. All of a sudden, I lost my temper. I took his glass of coke off the table and flung it directly into his face. To add insult to injury, I told him that his $20,000 was long gone, every last dime of it. "Consider yourself ripped off!" I said, as I walked away from the table. The stocky man didn't respond to having a drink thrown on him. Instead, he remained calm, and just wiped the dripping coke off of his face with the sleeve of his shirt. Five minutes later, he left the club.

Sefra was absolutely livid with me. "I can't believe you just did that!" she screamed, "You can't do that to a crazy asshole like him." Sefra was concerned about him retaliating. I couldn't have cared less. In my professional opinion, there were some customers that you just had to dump, and Ken was one of them.

After things cooled down between Sefra and me, we decided that it would probably behoove us to not show up for work for the next couple of nights. To avoid the possibility of Ken returning to the club later on in the evening, Sefra and I left work a couple of hours early. That night, I made it a point to watch my rearview mirror closely while driving home from the club. Although I wasn't overly concerned, I certainly wasn't oblivious to what these customers were capable of doing.

My roommates were still up partying when I got home. As usual, they asked me how my night was. I told them the latest episode. Most people found my career fascinating, and loved to hear all the horror stories about the clubs. The majority of the tales were so outrageous that a portion of my audience found them difficult to believe.

It was close to 4:30 in the morning before I got to bed. I tossed and turned for close to an hour before I succumbed to taking a couple of my prescription sleeping pills. These pills offered me some relief from my life, which I was in dire need of. Up to this point, I was able to dismiss my career as "just some stupid job." But for some reason, I wasn't able to justify being in the business any longer. At forty-five years old, I should have been long gone from the strip clubs. The fact that I wasn't ate at me constantly. I couldn't understand why I allowed myself to remain in some dirty dump watching men suck on boots and hump restaurant booths. In a way, I felt that I wasn't much better than the sick men that patronized the clubs. Year after year, I kept complaining to everyone about my life; however, I did nothing to change it and I couldn't figure out why. Finally, the sleeping pills kicked in and I drifted off into a deep, painless, drug-induced sleep.

I was woken up several hours later from the incessant ringing of the telephone that was next to my bed. My answering machine was set to pick up after two rings, but for some reason, it wasn't working. I

took the phone off the hook and drifted back to sleep. A few minutes later, I heard someone knocking on my bedroom door, calling my name. It was my roommate telling me to pick up my phone. I asked her who it was. She told me that it was Sefra. Apparently, she had called my roommates line, because she couldn't get through to mine. Still relatively sedated from the sleeping pills, I instructed my roommate to tell her to call me back later. My roommate, who was obviously angered with me, began to bang louder on the door and shouted, "You better pick up the damn phone, it's an emergency!" What kind of emergency could Sefra possibly be having, I thought to myself. Knowing Sefra, it was probably something stupid and inconsequential. I reluctantly picked up the phone for no other reason than to get my roommate off my back. I asked Sefra to tell me why she felt the need to call me so early in the morning. "Sorry to bother you, but I thought that you might like to know that you don't have a job anymore. The club burned down last night!"

Sefra exclaimed. I was so tired that I couldn't even think straight. The first thing that popped into my mind was that this was some type of joke. "Damn it," I said, "somebody beat me to it! Now can I go back to sleep?"

"What's wrong with you?" Sefra asked. "Are you taking those damn sleeping pills again?" she said, "Look, one of the dancers just called me. The club started on fire at about 5:30 a.m. I guess the police and the fire department are still there." Sefra said that she was headed down to the club, and that she'd meet me there in forty-five minutes.

Then she abruptly hung up the phone. I was tempted to take the phone back off the hook, but something told me not to. Although it was an effort on my part, I managed to drag myself out of bed and drive to the club. The Vegas Star was approximately 50 miles south of where I lived. As I drove down the open stretch of highway, I couldn't help but wonder if the whole thing wasn't just some sort of a practical joke. My gut feeling told me that it wasn't.

A surge of anxiety came over me as I exited off the highway, and began down the familiar street that would take me to the Vegas Star. I was now only a couple minutes away from my destination. I took a deep breath and continued driving.

By now the club was in plain view. The parking lot was packed, but not with the usual scores of men anxiously waiting for the doors of the club to open. Fire trucks, ambulances, and police officers occupied the premises instead. Traffic was backed up for miles. The police had blocked off the parking lot of the club in the hopes of discouraging voyeurs. Clouds of dense-black smoke ominously hovered over what used to be the Vegas Star. Now the club was

nothing more than a smoldering pile of black rubbish. The man-made hell was no more.

I parked my car on the side of the road, and waited for my business partner to show up. A few minutes later, Sefra arrived with a hand full of our co-workers.

Sefra walked over to the passenger side of my car and motioned for me to unlock the door. She slid into the front seat and slammed the car door closed. “I bet you anything that Ken did this,” she nonchalantly said as she pulled out a cigarette from one of the pockets of her black-leather jacket, “I talked to one of the doormen right before I got here, and he told me that the fire department officials strongly suspected arson.”

“I’d be surprised if it was anything other than that,” I replied, “the place didn’t exactly generate a lot of satisfied customers.”

“That’s true,” Sefra wearily said as she pushed her unruly mane of hair away from her pretty face. For the next thirty minutes, we sat in silence while we watched the fire fighters suffocate the last of the flames. My emotions shifted rapidly from relief to despair as I watched my financial security collapse. I had absolutely no idea what I was going to do.

Though, not by my own hand, my twenty-three years as a stripper had finally come to an end. Unfortunately, somebody had to do it for me. In hindsight, I was foolish to believe that the situation could have ended any other way. Sefra asked me what I was going to do now that the club Vegas Star was gone. She wanted to know if I would like to work at a bondage parlor or a peep show with her. I laughed at her absurd proposition and politely declined her offer. I explained to her that I was practically forty-five years old and was finished working in this type of business. Sefra felt that she couldn’t afford to leave the sex industry. She was four years older than I was and in my opinion, she couldn’t afford to stay in it. Sefra and I talked for another twenty minutes, and then we said our goodbyes. We agreed to stay in touch, but that didn’t happen. Our lives went in two totally different directions. I never saw Sefra again.

8. Living with the Aftermath

"I guess I am just like a turtle,
Hiding underneath its horny shell,
But you know I'm very well protected,
I know this god damn life too well."

Janis Joplin, "Turtle Blues"

I have now been out of the sex industry for approximately five years. After the club Vegas Star burned down, I ended up having to take a fairly low-paying job despite the fact that I was college educated. The fact that I didn't have any job experience hurt me tremendously. I made a monumental mistake by staying in the business for so long. Reentering a society that I hadn't been a part of for over twenty years was, and still is, a huge challenge for me. Unlike the average person, I never learned how to support myself outside of the confines of a strip club. Job interviews, scrutinizing employers, and eleven dollars an hour jobs were a foreign entity to me.

Although I am no longer emotionally enslaved by my career as an exotic dancer, my past continues to haunt me every time I fill out a job application or interview with a prospective employer. It's not easy to have to continually hide twenty-three years of your life. However, I am forced to do this if I want to secure any type of employment. The fact that I will always have to conceal my life keeps me chained to my checkered past as an exotic dancer. Unfortunately, this ball and chain will accompany me for as long as I remain in the workforce. I never thought about this when I first entered into the business. The immediate gratification of making a quick buck was my only concern. Now at forty-nine years of age, I'm paying the price.

Cleaning up the mess that I had made of my life hasn't been particularly easy.

One of the most difficult challenges that I'm faced with is my indecisiveness about what I want to do for a living. I still feel professionally displaced. I don't know which way to turn, and realistically, I don't have a lot of time left to figure it out. The future frightens me, and in some odd way, I'm just as directionless as I was twenty-three years ago. I guess some things never change. On top of

feeling professionally displaced, I often ruminate about my past. I can't seem to forgive myself for making such a poor life choice. It's difficult for me to justify the years that I spent wasting away in the strip clubs.

Would I do it all over again? If the circumstances were the same, the answer is "yes." Working as an exotic dancer certainly beat ending up in the streets, regardless of how deplorable I found the profession to be. In hindsight, I truly believe that if I had received the proper psychiatric help as a young girl, the probability of me ending up as a stripper would've been significantly reduced. Very few women end up in the sex industry entirely of their own design.

On a more positive note, I consider myself to be a survivor of an occupation that mainstream society considers to be completely incorrigible. I was fortunate in the sense that I never indulged in any type of substance abuse or overt prostitution.

However, this doesn't make me superior to all the women who did. It just made me different. Practically all of the dancers that I knew had developed some type of self-destructive coping mechanism, myself included.

Although it has been difficult, I have managed to change some of my self-destructive habits. I no longer surround myself with toxic people or remain in situations that I feel could be detrimental to me. I have lots of wonderful people in my life, and a family that is very supportive. God has taken care of me, in spite of it all.

As far as the fates of the people that I had known and worked with in the past, I honestly don't know. Last I heard, several of the owners and managers of the strip clubs that I used to work at have died. Others have managed to get on with their lives after serving hefty prison sentences. The feedback that I've received regarding some of the dancers that I'd known and worked with hasn't been particularly encouraging. A large number of these women still engage in heavy substance abuse. Others have committed suicide, gone to prison, or have succumbed to full-blown prostitution. Very few of the women that I've stayed in contact with have successfully re-entered mainstream society.

I was fortunate enough to be one of them. However, this didn't mean that I'm entirely out of the woods. I still suffer from depression, but I've managed to keep it at bay with the help of antidepressants. Sometimes I wonder if I'll ever completely recover from all that I've been through. Poor life choices have a tendency to generate a lot of personal baggage, and in the end, there are very few people willing to help you carry it.

Where do I go from here? I'm not certain. As far as I'm concerned, I have only two choices. I can either sink or swim. For the time being,

I have chosen the latter of the two. For me, it's all about emotional survival. Hopefully, I've made the right decision. My best guess is that only time will tell.

Psychiatric studies have indicated that a majority of the women who have worked in the sex industry as prostitutes, exotic dancers, or strippers for any significant length of time were more often than not psychologically damaged for life.

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New York Lincoln Shanghai

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2021 Pine Lake Road, Suite 100
Lincoln, NE 68512
www.iuniverse.com
1-800-Authors (1-800-288-4677)
ISBN-13: 978-0-595-35504-4 (pbk)
ISBN-13: 978-0-595-79992-3 (ebk)
ISBN-10: 0-595-35504-8 (pbk)
ISBN-10: 0-595-79992-2 (ebk)
Printed in the United States of America